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Gerard De Nerval  
The women of Cairo

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# THE WOMEN OF CAIRO

VOLUME ONE





GERARD DE NERVAL

# THE WOMEN OF CAIRO

SCENES OF LIFE IN THE ORIENT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CONRAD ELPHINSTONE

*VOLUME ONE*



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## INTRODUCTION

**M**ONSIEUR RENE BIZET, the author of a recent *Life of Gérard de Nerval*,\* somewhere makes what, at first glance, seems to be the startling suggestion that there is much in common between his hero and Mr. Charlie Chaplin. He explains that when he sees a Chaplin film—*The Circus*, for example, or *A Dog's Life*—he feels that Chaplin, of all men, might most admirably illustrate by his own art, by the expression, that is to say, of his own personality through that art, the enigmatic personality of the poet.

There is indeed between Gérard de Nerval and Charlie Chaplin a common bond of sentimental yearning which expresses itself so simply that its very simplicity astounds us, a simplicity which our own sophistication will not allow us to emulate, but which attracts and holds us. Gérard de Nerval was never a *poseur*. If he set out through the garden of the Palais Royal with a lobster at the end of a blue ribbon, he did so probably without any desire to create an impression upon the bystanders, and even without any sense of the ridiculous. He is an incorrigible dreamer, whose dreams at times take possession of him and make him unintelligible to those who are incapable of dreaming because they are so bound up in the material things of life. Gérard's genius was that of a dreamer.

\* *La Double Vie de Gerard de Nerval*. Plon; Paris, 1928.

## INTRODUCTION

Chaplin too is a dreamer. His genius consists in his power to express longings that are somewhere inherent in all of us, and this he does so comically that we imagine we are laughing at the absurdity of some grotesque figure's antics, antics of which we ourselves would be incapable. Yet our laughter is always near to tears because we realise, in some unconscious part of us, that Charlie's continual misadventures, his pertinacity in the face of overwhelming disappointments, as he pursues his search for an object which seems always to elude him, are but an image of our own eternal search for an ideal. This ideal, if others could only see into our hearts, if they could only unveil the absurdities of thought and conduct into which that often unacknowledged search leads us, they would find as divertingly ridiculous as the antics which Chaplin's characters perform on the screen.

For the most part, we keep our secrets. Gérard de Nerval occasionally lets us into his. "I like to live my life," he tells us, "as if it were a romance, and I am always ready to put myself in the position of one of those active, resolute heroes who must, at any cost, create an atmosphere of drama, interest and action around them." He is content to be deceived, to accept illusion for reality. "You think," he writes, "not that I am in love, but that I think I am in love, as if, so far as results are concerned, it is not the same thing."

He delights in the ridiculous, because, in what appears to be most ridiculous, the most profound truths are ever hidden. Sophistication, and the formality which results from sophistication, are anathema to him. He has no words of scorn cutting enough to castigate the materialistically minded

## INTRODUCTION

tourist who, unfortunately, is typified for him by the Englishman in Egypt. An old sheik tells him a marvellous story about the origin of the pyramids, and he finds it much more credible than the accepted results of archæological research. The mysteries of the Druses have an irresistible fascination for him because they make so strong a claim upon his imagination. He is always in eager pursuit of the unknown, because he is always sure that the unknown will bring him nearer his ideal, that ideal which is continually being identified with some new object, though a psycho-analyst would make short work of it and, with a horrid realism, assure us that it had never changed at all. And, though he pretends to be slightly shocked, he is wildly enthusiastic over *Caragueux*, the Charlie Chaplin of Constantinople, whose wild misfortunes, reminiscent in some measure of those in *A Dog's Life*, must have touched an answering chord somewhere within himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gérard Labrunie—the name de Nerval was a pseudonym—was born at Paris in 1808, and spent his childhood near Mortefontaine in Valois. His mother he never knew, and his father, who was an army doctor, did his duty by Gérard, but obviously failed to understand him. Father and son were mildly and consistently affectionate to one another, but no confidences passed between them.

In 1826, he published a first little book of poems, *Napoléon et la France Guerrière*, and then began an association with the *Mercure de France* through which he came into relation with Théophile Gautier, Arsène Houssaye, and the elder Dumas. When he was twenty-six years old, he suddenly fell in love with

## INTRODUCTION

Jenny Colon, an actress at the Opéra-Comique, who was about the same age as himself. We really know very little about this love affair. It seems obvious that to Gérard, the actress represented that phantom ideal of which he speaks so often, if indirectly, in his books. She was his Queen of Saba, possibly even she inspired the picture of the Druse maiden whom, he tells us in this book, he wished to marry, though the Fates ordained otherwise. His admiration for his Aurélia, an admiration which he seems to have realised was hopeless, set him off upon a new career of imaginative life, through new realms of dream and phantasy, which, on the one hand, led to such enterprises as the voyage to the Orient, and, on the other, to the madhouse.

Jenny Colon died in December, 1842, and at the beginning of the following year, Gérard embarked at Marseilles for Alexandria, returning from Constantinople at the end of 1843. He had already, in 1841, been compelled to stay for a while at the establishment for the insane kept by a certain Doctor Blanche.

Such visits to Dr. Blanche's house became more frequent. Gérard's craving for an imaginative ideal was becoming master of his actions and rendering him incapable of supporting the realities of everyday life. He realised this well enough himself. "I do not ask God to change anything," he wrote in 1844, "but to change me in my relation to things; to give me the power to create around me a universe of my own, the power to direct this never-ending dream of mine, and not to suffer it."

The prayer was not granted, and the situation became unbearable. Gérard de Nerval left the madhouse, against the advice of the doctors. One freezing night of January, 1855, he set out through the streets



## INTRODUCTION

of Paris. He visited his friend Asselineau, borrowed a few coppers from him, and disappeared into the cold again. The next morning, he was found hanging to the bars outside the window of a miserable common lodging-house in the Rue de la Vieille-Lanterne. His strange pilgrimage on earth was over. "Poor young man!" said his aged father, when the news was brought to him. "Poor young man!"

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The part of the *Voyage en Orient* which is here translated first appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1846 and 1847. Later, when the chapters appeared together in book form, a section was added to them which gives an account of de Nerval's travels through Europe before he went to the East. The work appeared as a whole with the title of *Voyage en Orient*—it had previously been called *Scènes de la Vie Orientale*—in Charpentier's edition of 1851. Then, de Nerval added a series of appendices, but as the majority of the material in them is obviously taken directly from Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, which had been published in 1836, I have not thought it worth while to reproduce them.

CONRAD ELPHINSTONE.

May, 1929.



# THE WOMEN OF CAIRO

## PART I

### COPTIC MARRIAGES

#### I

#### THE MASK AND THE VEIL

**T**HROUGHOUT the length and breadth of the Levant, there is no town where women are more utterly and completely veiled than at Cairo. At Constantinople, at Smyrna, through a veil of white or black gauze, it is occasionally possible to catch a glimpse of the face of some Muslim beauty. No matter how severe the laws may be, they seldom succeed in rendering that delicate tissue any more opaque. The veiled beauties are like graceful and coquettish nuns who, though they have consecrated themselves to the service of a single spouse, yet do not think it amiss to spare an occasional thought for the world. Egypt, serious and devout, is still the land of enigmas and mysteries. There, beauty surrounds itself, as it has ever done, with veils and coverings, a depressing habit that soon discourages the frivolous European. After a week, he has had enough of Cairo, and hurries off to the cataracts of the Nile, where fresh disappointments are in store for him, though he will never admit it.

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To the initiate of ancient days, patience was the greatest of all virtues. Why should we be in such a hurry ? Rather let us stay and try to raise a corner of that austere veil which the goddess of Saïs wears. Besides, though we are in a land where women are supposed to be prisoners, we see thousands of them in the bazaars, streets, and gardens, strolling alone or in couples, or with a child. In actual fact, they enjoy more liberty than European women. It is true that women of position go out, perched up on donkeys, where nobody can get at them; but even in our own land, women of a corresponding rank hardly ever go out except in a carriage. There is certainly the veil, but possibly it is not such a ferocious obstacle as might be imagined.

Among the rich Arabic and Turkish costumes which the reform movement has spared, the mysterious dress of the women gives to the crowd which throngs the streets the lively appearance of a fancy-dress ball, though the shade of the dominoes only varies between black and blue. Ladies of distinction veil their forms beneath a *habbarah* of light silk, and women of the people wear a simple tunic of wool or cotton (*khamiss*), with all the grace of an ancient statue. There is scope for the imagination in this disguise, and it does not extend to all their charms. Beautiful hands adorned with talismanic rings, and silver bracelets; sometimes alabaster-like arms escaping from the broad sleeves pulled back over the shoulder; bare feet, laden with rings, which leave their slippers at every step, while the heels clatter along with a silvery tinkle—all these we may admire, divine, surprise, without annoying the crowd, or causing any embarrassment to the woman herself. Sometimes, the folds of the veil, with its white and blue check, which covers the head and

## THE MASK AND THE VEIL

shoulders, get slightly out of position, and the light, passing between it and the long mask which they call *borghot*, gives us a glimpse of a charming brow over which the brown hair falls in closely bound ringlets, like those we have seen in busts of Cleopatra; or a tiny, well-shaped ear, from which clusters of golden sequins, or a jewel of turquoise and silver filigree, dangle over cheeks and neck. It is then we feel impelled to ask a question of the veiled Egyptian's eyes, and that is the moment of greatest danger. The mask is made of a narrow long piece of black horsehair, and it falls from head to feet, pierced by two holes, like the hooded cloak of a penitent. A few tiny bright rings are threaded in the space between the forehead and the long part of the mask, and from behind that rampart, ardent eyes await you, with all the seductions they can borrow from art. The eyebrow, the socket of the eye, even the inner side of the eyelid, are brightened by some colouring matter, and it would be impossible for a woman to make more of that small part of her person which she is permitted to show.

When I first came here, I did not quite understand what the attraction could be about the mystery with which the more interesting half of the people of the Orient enshrouds itself. But a few days sufficed to show me that a woman who knows herself to be the object of attention can usually find an opportunity to let herself be seen—if she is beautiful. Those who are not beautiful are wiser to retain their veils, and we cannot be angry with them on that account. This is indeed the country of dreams and of illusions. Ugliness is hidden as if it were a crime, but there is always something to be seen of grace, of beauty, and of youth.

The town itself, like those who dwell in it, unveils

## COPTIC MARRIAGES

its most shady retreats, its most delightful interiors, only by degrees. The evening I arrived at Cairo, I felt mortally discouraged and depressed. Wandering about on donkey-back with a dragoman for company, a few hours sufficed to make me sure that I was about to spend the most tedious six months of all my life, and matters had been arranged in such a way that I could not stay a single day less. "What!" said I to myself, "is this the city of the Thousand and One Nights, the capital of the Fatimite Caliphs and the Sultans?" . . . And I plunged into the inextricable rabbit-warren of narrow, dusty streets, through the ragged crowd, the pestering dogs, camels, and donkeys, just at nightfall, which comes quickly here, because of the dust and the great height of the houses.

What could I hope from this confused labyrinth, perhaps as large as Paris or Rome; from these palaces and mosques which are to be numbered in thousands? Doubtless, once upon a time, it was all very splendid and marvellous, but thirty generations have passed, and now the stone is breaking into dust, and the wood is rotting, everywhere. It seems as though one were travelling in a dream through a city of the past where only phantoms dwell, populating it but giving it no life. Each quarter of the city with its battlemented walls, shut in by massive gates like those of the Middle Ages, still retains the appearance which it doubtless had in Saladin's day; long vaulted passages lead from one street to another, and very often one finds oneself in a street from which there is no way out, and has to return again the way one came. Little by little, every place is shut up: only the cafés still show a light, where the smokers, seated on palm baskets, in the dim light given by tiny wicks floating upon oil, listen to some long story droned out in a nasal voice.

## THE MASK AND THE VEIL

But lights begin to appear behind the *moucharabys*, which are wooden grills, curiously worked and carved, that come out over the street and serve as windows. The light which comes from them is not sufficient to guide the wayfarer. Moreover, the hour of curfew is early here, so everyone provides himself with a lantern, and few people are to be met out of doors except Europeans and soldiers going their rounds.

For my own part, I had no idea what I could do in the streets when the curfew hour was past—ten o'clock, to be precise—and I went to bed in a very melancholy frame of mind, telling myself that it would doubtless be the same every day, and giving up all hope of finding any amusement in this fallen capital. As I began to go to sleep, I seemed to hear in some strange way the vague sounds of a bagpipe and a scraping fiddle, sounds extremely irritating to the nerves. In different tones, this persistent music continually repeated the same melodic phrase which brought to my mind the memory of some old carol from Burgundy or Provence. Was I awake or dreaming? It was some time before my mind definitely decided to wake up. It seemed to me that I was being carried to the grave in a manner at once serious and comic, escorted by cantors from the parish church and toppers wreathed in vine branches. There was a mixture of patriarchal gaiety and mythological melancholy in this strange concert, in which the solemn strains of the music of the Church formed the basis of a comic air which would have served as a suitable accompaniment to a dance of Corybants. The noise grew louder as it came nearer; I got out of bed still half asleep, and a bright light, coming through the outer trellis of my window, at last told me that the spectacle was of a purely material nature. Neverthe-

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less, there was some degree of reality about my dream. Men, almost naked, wearing wreaths like the wrestlers of antiquity, were fighting with swords and shields in the middle of the crowd. They contented themselves with striking the copper with the steel in time with the music, and then, setting off again, began the same mock combat a little farther on. A number of torches and pyramids of candles carried by children brilliantly lighted up the street, showing the way to a long procession of men and women, the details of which I could not distinguish. Something like a red phantom, wearing a crown of precious stones, advanced slowly between two matrons of grave demeanour, and a group of women in blue dresses brought up the rear, at each stopping-place uttering a strident clucking with the weirdest effect.

There was no longer any doubt. It was a marriage. At Paris, in the engravings of citizen Cassas, I had seen a complete picture of these ceremonies. But what I had just seen through my fretted window was not enough to satisfy my curiosity, and I determined that, at all costs, I would go after the procession and observe it more at my leisure. My dragoman Abdullah, when I told him my intention, pretended to be alarmed at my audacity, for he had not much desire to go through the streets in the middle of the night, and talked to me about the dangers of being murdered or beaten. Fortunately I had bought one of those camel's-hair cloaks which they call *machlah*, which cover a man from head to foot; with this, and with my long beard, and a handkerchief twisted round my head, the disguise was complete.



## A WEDDING BY TORCHLIGHT

### II

#### A WEDDING BY TORCHLIGHT

The difficulty was to catch up the procession, which, by now, had lost itself in a labyrinth of streets and blind alleys. My dragoman had lighted a paper lantern, and we went wherever chance took us, sometimes guided and sometimes misled by the sounds of the bagpipes in the distance, or by gleams of light reflected at the crossroads. At last we reached the gate of another quarter than our own: the houses were lighted up, the dogs barked, and we found ourselves in a long street blazing with light and humming with noise, filled with people, even to the tops of the houses.

The procession advanced very slowly to the melancholy strains of instruments which imitated the obstinate sound of a creaking door, or a chariot trying out a new set of wheels. Those who were responsible for this racket numbered about twenty, and marched along surrounded by men with torches. Then came the children weighed down by huge candelabra, whose candles shed their bright light in all directions. During the many halts, the gladiators continued their contests; some, on stilts, and wearing flowers in their hair, attacked one another with long staves. Farther on, young men carried flags and poles surmounted by emblems and gilded attributes, like those we see in pictures of Roman triumphs. Others carried little trees decorated with garlands and wreaths, with lighted candles and tinsel, just like our Christmas trees. Broad plates of gilded copper, raised upon poles, covered with ornaments and inscriptions, reflected the lights

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in all directions. Then came the singing girls (*oualems*) and dancing girls (*ghavazies*) in dresses of shimmering silk, wearing tarbooshes with golden crowns, their long tresses glistening with sequins. Some had their noses pierced by long rings, and showed their faces painted in red and blue; others, though they too sang and danced, were religiously veiled. Usually, they accompanied themselves upon cymbals, castanets and tabours. Two long files of slaves followed, bearing coffers and baskets with the presents which the bridegroom and his family had given to the bride; then the guests, the women in the middle, carefully draped in long mantillas and wearing white masks like persons of rank and standing, and the men well dressed, for on that day, as my dragoman told me, even the poor *fellahs* somehow manage to secure the proper garments. And lastly, in the dazzling centre of torchlight, candlebras and fire-pots, there advanced slowly the red phantom I had seen before, the bride (*el arouss*), veiled from head to foot in a long shawl, the fringes of which fell to her feet. The material was doubtless light enough to allow her to see without being seen. Nothing could seem stranger than this tall figure coming forward under its pleated veil, made still more tall by a kind of pyramid-shaped diadem, sparkling with precious stones. Two matrons, dressed in black, supported her by the elbows, in such a way that she seemed to glide over the ground: four slaves held a purple canopy above her head, and others walked beside her to the sound of drums and cymbals.

At the very moment when I was admiring the sight, there was another halt, and children distributed seats so that the bride and her relations might rest awhile. The *oualems*, returning, entertained us with improvisations and choruses accompanied by music

## A WEDDING BY TORCHLIGHT

and dancing, and those who stood by repeated some of the passages from their songs. I, who at that moment happened to be in full view, opened my mouth like the rest, and imitated as well as I could the *eleyson* and the *amen* which serve as responses to the most profane of couplets; but I was to run a greater risk of being discovered. I had not noticed that for some moments slaves had been going through the crowd, pouring out some clear liquid into little cups which they handed to anyone who happened to be near. A tall Egyptian, dressed in red, who was probably a member of the family, presided over the distribution and received the thanks of those who drank. He was only two steps away from me, and I had not the faintest idea of how I ought to speak to him. Fortunately, I had time enough to watch what my neighbours did, and when my turn came, I took the cup in my left hand and bowed, carrying my right hand to my heart, my forehead and my mouth. These are simple movements to perform, but care must be taken not to do them in the wrong order, or clumsily. Thereafter, I had the right to swallow the contents of the cup, and I was considerably startled. It was brandy, or rather a kind of anisette. How comes it that Mohammedans have such a beverage distributed at their weddings? I had expected nothing more than sherbet or lemonade. And it was easy to see that the dancers, the musicians, and the buffoons of the procession had enjoyed a share in this distribution more than once.

At last the bride rose and continued her way; the *fellah* women, in their blue dresses, followed, making their weird cluckings, and the procession went on its way through the night to the house of the newly married couple.

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Satisfied that I had comported myself as a true inhabitant of Cairo, and behaved becomingly at this ceremony, I made a sign to summon my dragoman. He had gone on so that he might place himself again in the way of those who were distributing the brandy. But he was in no hurry to go home, for he was enjoying the feast immensely.

"We will follow them into the house," he said in a low tone.

"But what shall I say if anyone speaks to me?"

"Just say *Tayeb*! That will do for an answer to anything. And I shall be there to change the subject."

I already knew that *tayeb* was a fundamental word in the Egyptian language. It is a word which, according to the intonation one gives it, means all sorts of things. Yet it cannot be compared with the English "*goddam*" unless to mark the difference between a nation which possesses police and one that has no more than police. The word *tayeb* can mean "very well," or "excellent!", or "that is good," or "at your service"; the tone, and especially the gesture which accompanies it, provide an infinite variety of shades of meaning. It certainly seemed to promise greater security than the method of which a celebrated traveller—Belzoni, I think—speaks. He went into a mosque, admirably disguised, making all the gestures which he saw his neighbours make, but, as he could not answer a question which was put to him, his dragoman said to those who seemed inquisitive: "He does not understand: he is an English 'Turk'!"

Through a gateway adorned with flowers and foliage, we passed into a very fine courtyard lighted up by coloured lanterns. The *moucharabys* with their delicate carving stood out against the orange background

## A WEDDING BY TORCHLIGHT

of rooms lit up, and crowded with people. We had to stand and wait under the inner galleries. Only the women went up into the house. There they took off their veils, and thenceforth we could see no more of them than the dim outline, the colours and the brightness of their costumes and their jewels, through the trellises of turned wood.

While the ladies were being welcomed and feasted within by the bride and the women of both families, the husband got down from his donkey. Dressed in a red and gold robe, he received the compliments of the men and invited them to sit down at low tables, of which a great number were set up in the rooms of the ground floor, laden with dishes piled up like pyramids. One only had to sit cross-legged on the floor, pull a plate or a cup towards one, and eat decently with the fingers. Everybody seemed to be welcome. I did not venture to join the feast, for I feared lest I should show myself lacking in good manners. Besides, the liveliest part of it was in the courtyard, where dances were proceeding amid a deafening din. A troop of Nubian dancers was executing strange steps in the middle of a huge circle which was formed by those present; they went backwards and forwards, led by a veiled woman dressed in a broad striped cloak, who, with a curved sabre in her hand, seemed to threaten the dancers and run away from them in turn. Meanwhile, the *oualems*, or dancing girls, accompanied the dance with their songs, striking their fingers on terracotta drums (*tarabouki*), which they held with one arm on a level with their ears. The orchestra, which was made up of a host of queer instruments, did not fail to do its part, and the assistants also joined in, beating time with their hands. Between the dances, refreshments were handed round, among which was

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one which I had not expected. Black slaves, with little silver flagons, shook them here and there over the heads of the crowd. It was perfumed water, though I did not recognise its sweet rose scent till I felt drops which had happened to fall upon me trickling over my cheeks and down my beard.

One of those who had taken a most prominent part in the wedding approached me and said a few words most civilly. I answered with the invincible *tayeb*, which seemed to satisfy him perfectly. Then he spoke to my neighbours, and I asked my dragoman what he had said. "He was inviting you to go into the house to see the bride." I had undoubtedly accepted his invitation, but as, after all, it was only a matter of women hermetically veiled, walking around rooms filled with guests, I did not see any point in pressing the adventure any further. Certainly, the bride and her friends appear in the brilliant costumes which had been hidden by the black veil they wore in the streets, but I was not yet sufficiently sure of the pronunciation of the word *tayeb* to risk myself in the bosom of any family. We—the dragoman and I—reached the outer gate, which opened upon the Esbekieh.

"It is a pity," said the dragoman. "You would have seen the play."

"What's that?"

"Yes, the comedy."

I thought immediately of the illustrious *Caragueuz*, but it was not that. *Caragueuz* is produced only during religious festivals; it is a myth, a symbol of the deepest meaning: the play of which my dragoman spoke was simply a series of little comic scenes played by men, which might be compared to our charades. They are intended as an agreeable pastime for the guests while the bridal pair withdraw with their rela-

## A WEDDING BY TORCHLIGHT

tions to the part of the house which is reserved for women.

It seemed that these wedding celebrations had already lasted eight days. The dragoman told me that on the day of the contract there had been a sacrifice of sheep upon the threshold before the bride passed over it. He spoke, too, of another ceremony in which a sugar ball which contains two pigeons is broken. An augury is drawn from the flight of the birds. All these customs probably go right back to antiquity.

I reached home strangely moved by this nocturnal scene. Here, it seemed to me, was a people to whom marriage was an affair of serious import, and though the details of this particular marriage perhaps indicated a certain wealth in the families of the bride and bridegroom, the poorer classes marry with almost as much noise and splendour. They have not to pay the musicians, the buffoons and the dancers, for either these are friends of theirs or they make a collection among the crowd. The costumes are lent to them; each assistant carries his own torch or his own candle, and the bride's diadem is no less loaded with diamonds and rubies than that of a pasha's daughter. Where shall we find truer equality elsewhere? The young Egyptian who, perhaps, is neither beautiful beneath her veil nor rich under her array of diamonds, enjoys her one day of magnificence, on which she passes radiant through an admiring city which forms a procession for her; on which she glories in the purple and jewels of a queen, unknown, and as mysterious beneath her veil as the ancient goddess of the Nile. One man alone will possess the secret of that unknown beauty, of that hidden grace; one man alone can pursue his ideal all the day in peace, imagining himself

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the favourite of a sultana or a fairy. Even if he is disappointed, his self-esteem suffers in secret only, and besides, every man in this happy land may renew, if he will, this day of triumph and illusion.

### III

#### ABDULLAH THE DRAGOMAN

My dragoman is a gentleman of distinction, and I am not without fear lest he should prove too noble an attendant for a lord so insignificant as myself. It was at Alexandria, upon the deck of the steamer *Leonidas*, that he first appeared to me in all his glory. He had hailed the ship from a boat which he had hired, with a little black to carry his long pipe, and a younger dragoman to attend him. A long white tunic formed his outer garment and heightened the shade of his complexion: his Nubian blood gave colour to a mask that might have been borrowed from some Egyptian sphinx's head. He was, doubtless, the product of two mixed races. Broad golden rings weighed down his ears, and as he walked indolently in his long garments, he embodied for me the ideal portrait of a freedman of the Later Empire.

There were no Englishmen among the passengers, and the man, somewhat put out by this fact, attached himself to me for want of anyone better. We went ashore. He hired four donkeys for himself, his train and me, and took me straight to the Hôtel d'Angleterre, where they were kind enough to take me in, at the rate of sixty piastres a day. As for himself, he was content to charge me half that sum, and for



## ABDULLAH THE DRAGOMAN

it promised to maintain the second dragoman and the little black.

After going about all day with this imposing escort, I formed the opinion that the second dragoman served no useful purpose, nor did the small boy. Abdullah—for so my personage was called—saw no difficulty in dispensing with his younger colleague. But the little black he decided to keep at his own expense, and, moreover, reduced the amount of his own remuneration to twenty piastres a day, about four shillings.

When we reached Cairo, the donkeys bore us straight to the English hotel in the Esbekieh, but when I found that it would have cost me as much to stay there as I had paid at Alexandria, I checked this splendid keenness.

"Perhaps you would rather go to the Hotel Waghorn, in the Frankish quarter?" said the honest Abdullah.

"I should prefer a hotel which is not English."

"Well! There is Domergue's French hotel."

"Let us go there."

"I am sorry: I should be delighted to go with you, but I cannot stay there."

"Why?"

"Because it is a hotel which charges only forty piastres a day; it is no place for me."

"But I shall certainly go."

"You are not known, but I belong to the town. I usually serve English gentlemen, and I have my position to consider."

I thought the charges of this hotel very reasonable, even in a country where everything costs about six times less than in France, and where a man's day's work brings him one piastre, or twopence halfpenny

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in our money. "The matter can be arranged," said Abdullah. "Stay two or three days at the Hôtel Domergue, and I will come and see you as a friend. Meanwhile, I will take a house for you in the town, and then there will be no difficulty about my staying in your service."

It seemed that many Europeans take houses at Cairo, however short the time they stay there, and, when I learned this, I gave authority to Abdullah to do what he thought fit.

The Hôtel Domergue is situated at the end of a blind alley which leads out of the principal street in the Frankish quarter, and it is a very respectable, well-kept hotel. The buildings surround a square whitewashed courtyard whose walls are hidden beneath a trellis covered with vines. A French painter, a very pleasant fellow, although a little deaf, and highly talented, although greatly interested in photography, has one of the upper storeys for a studio. There, from time to time, he takes orange sellers and sugar-cane sellers of the town, who are good enough to act as models. They raise no difficulties about allowing him to study the form of the principal races of Egypt, but the majority of them insist upon keeping their faces veiled, for the face is the last refuge of Oriental modesty.

The French hotel has a very pleasant garden, and its table successfully struggles with the difficulties of providing a varied European fare in a town where there is no beef or veal. It is this fact which explains the dearness of the English hotels, where the cooking is done with preserved meat and vegetables, as on a ship. The Englishman, no matter where he is, will never do without his ordinary of roast beef, potatoes, and porter or ale.

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At dinner, I met a colonel, a bishop *in partibus*, some painters, a language mistress, and two Indians from Bombay, one of whom was acting as tutor to the other. It looked as though our host's southern type of cooking seemed insipid to them, for they took out of their pockets silver pots containing the pepper and mustard to which they were accustomed, and sprinkled it liberally over all their food. They offered some to me. The sensation which might be felt if one chewed hot cinders would give an exact idea of the taste of these condiments.

I may complete my picture of my stay at the French hotel by mentioning a piano on the first floor, and a billiard table on the ground floor, and the statement that I might just as well have stayed at Marseilles. I prefer, myself, to live exactly as the Orientals themselves do. They have very handsome houses of several storeys, courtyards and gardens, which cost no more than three hundred piastres (about three pounds) a year. Abdullah showed me several in the Coptic and Greek quarters. They had gorgeously decorated rooms with marble floors and fountains, galleries and staircases like those of the palaces at Genoa or Venice, courtyards surrounded by columns and gardens, and shaded by fine trees. In them, one might live like a prince, if one could only fill them with attendants and slaves. And in them all, not a single room fit to live in, unless one should expend enormous sums; not a pane of glass in all those beautifully carven windows, open to the wind of evening and the dampness of the night. Men and women do live like this at Cairo, though ophthalmia often punishes them for their foolhardiness, and this comes simply from lack of fresh air. After all, I did not care much for the prospect of camping out, so to speak, in a corner of

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an immense palace. Many of these buildings which were once the dwellings of an aristocracy that has now died out, go back to the reign of the Mameluke sultans, and threaten to fall down at any moment.

In the end, Abdullah found me a house much smaller, but safer and better secured. An Englishman had recently lived in it, and he had had his windows glazed, which was supposed to be an extraordinary thing to do. We had to go to the sheik of the quarter to carry through our negotiations with the owner, a Coptic widow. This woman had more than twenty houses, but she held them as a proxy for foreigners, for in Egypt foreigners are not allowed to become the legal owners of property. Actually, the house belonged to an archivist at the English Consulate.

The agreement was drawn up in Arabic. I had to pay my rent, give presents to the sheik, the lawyer and the nearest head of the police, and give baksheesh to the scribes and attendants. Then the sheik handed me the key. This instrument is not like ours: it is made of a plain piece of wood like a baker's talley, and at the end of it are five or six nails which seem to have come there haphazard, but not at all! You put this strange key into an opening in the door; the nails fit into little holes inside which you cannot see, and on the other side there is a wooden bolt which shifts and gives you entry.

It is not enough to have the wooden key to one's house, the key which would never go into anyone's pocket but must be stuck in the belt. One must have furniture corresponding to the degree of magnificence of the interior, though in all the Cairo houses this is a very simple matter. Abdullah took me to a bazaar where we had a few *ocques* of cotton weighed out for us. With that and some chintz, carders who come

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to the house very quickly make divan cushions which serve as mattresses during the night. The principal piece of furniture is a long basket-work affair which a basket-maker constructs in front of you with strips of palm. It is light, elastic, and stronger than might be imagined. A little round table, a few cups, long pipes or narghiles—unless you prefer to borrow all these from the neighbouring café—and you are ready to receive the best society in the town. Only the Pasha possesses a complete set of furniture, lamps and clocks, and he only has them to show how great a friend he is to commerce and European civilization.

Anyone who particularly desires to make a show must also have mats, carpets, and even curtains. In the bazaars, I met a Jew who very kindly intervened between Abdullah and the merchants to prove to me that both parties were robbing me. When the furniture was installed, the Jew took advantage of the occasion to settle down in a friendly way on one of the divans. I had to provide him with a pipe and have him served with coffee. He was called Yousef, and, for three months in the year, devoted himself to the cultivation of silkworms. The rest of the time, he told me, he had nothing else to do but go and see how the mulberry leaves were coming on and whether there would be a good crop. He really seemed perfectly disinterested, and sought the company of strangers merely to acquire breeding and perfect himself in French.

My house was in a street in the Coptic quarter which leads to that gate of the city beyond which are the avenues of Choubrah. In front of it there was a café, and a little farther a donkey stand, where donkeys might be had for a piastre an hour, and farther still a little mosque with a minaret. The first evening

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I heard the deliberate serene voice of the muezzin at sunset, a feeling of inexpressible sadness came over me.

"What does he say?" I asked the dragoman.

"*La Allah ila Allah!* . . . There is no other God than God!"

"That formula I know; but what else?"

"O ye who are about to sleep, commit your souls to God who never sleeps!"

Certain it is that sleep is another life which we must take account of. Ever since I have been in Cairo, all the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights* keep running through my head, and in my dreams I see all the spirits and the giants who have been let loose upon the world since the days of Solomon. In France, people laugh at the demons to whom sleep gives birth, and see in them only the product of an excited imagination, but so far as we are concerned, do they exist any the less for that, and, in the state of sleep, do we not experience all the sensations of real life? In an atmosphere so warm as that of Egypt, sleep is often heavy and disturbed, and, it is said, the Pasha keeps an attendant always standing at the head of his bed to wake him up each time his movements or his face show that his sleep is so disturbed. But is it not sufficient to commend oneself simply, fervently and confidently, to Him who never sleeps?

## IV

### THE INCONVENIENCES OF CELIBACY

I have told the story of my first night, and there is no need for me to explain why I found it necessary the next morning to arise rather late in

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consequence. Abdullah announced that the sheik of my quarter was awaiting me, and that he had already called once before that morning. The excellent old gentleman with his white beard was waiting for me to wake up, and was at the café opposite with his secretary and the negro who carried his pipe. His patience did not astonish me. Every European who is not a manufacturer or a merchant is a person of importance in Egypt. The sheik was sitting on one of the divans; his pipe was filled for him and coffee was served to him. Then he began his speech, and Abdullah translated it for me as he went along.

“He has come to bring you back the money you paid for the house.”

“Why? What reason does he give?”

“He says that your mode of life is not understood; your habits seem rather strange.”

“Has he observed that they were bad?”

“He doesn’t mean that; he knows nothing about them.”

“Why doesn’t he think well of them, then?”

“He says he thought you were going to live in this house with your wife.”

“But I haven’t got a wife.”

“That is not his affair. He says your neighbours have wives, and they will be uneasy if you have not. Besides it is the custom here.”

“What does he wish me to do?”

“Either leave the house, or find a woman to live in it with you.”

“Tell him that in my country it is not respectable to live with a woman unless one is married to her.”

The old gentleman’s response to this highly moral observation was accompanied by a thoroughly paternal

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expression which translated words can only render imperfectly.

"He offers you a piece of advice," said Abdullah. "He says that a gentleman (an *effendi*) like you ought not to live alone, that to support a wife and treat her well is always honourable. It is still better, he says, to support several, if one's religion allows it."

I was impressed by the argument of this 'Turk, but my European conscience rebelled against his point of view, the reasonableness of which I only understood when I had more deeply studied the position of women in this country. I told Abdullah to ask the sheik to wait until I had sought the advice of my friends.

I had taken the house for six months, furnished it, and was very well satisfied, and all I wished was to find some way of preventing the sheik from breaking the agreement and turning me out because I was a celibate. After much hesitation, I decided to go and ask the advice of the painter who lived in the Hôtel Domergue, and who had been kind enough to take me into his studio, and initiate me into the marvels of his daguerreotype. So deaf was this painter that a conversation through an interpreter would have seemed amusing and simple compared to one with him.

However, I went to see him, crossing the Esbekieh on my way. When I came to the corner of a street which turns off to the Frankish quarter, I heard cries of joy coming from a large courtyard where some very fine horses were, at that moment, being walked up and down. One of those who was thus exercising the horses leaped upon my neck and threw his arms around me. He was a hefty fellow dressed in a blue coat, with a yellow turban on his head, whom I remembered having noticed on the steamer because



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his face seemed so astonishingly like the large painted heads one sees on the outer coverings of mummies.

"*Tayeb! tayeb!*" I said to this demonstrative mortal, trying to free myself from his embrace, and looking behind me for my dragoman Abdullah. But Abdullah was lost among the crowd: he probably did not care to be seen attending one who was the friend of a common groom. This Mussulman, spoilt as he was by English tourists, did not remember that Mohammed had been a camel driver.

The Egyptian pulled me by the sleeve and dragged me into the courtyard, which was that attached to the stud of the Pasha of Egypt. There, at the end of a gallery, half lying upon a wooden divan, I recognised another of my travelling companions, one who was perhaps a little more presentable in society. This was Soliman-Aga, whom I had met upon the Austrian ship, the *Francisco Primo*. Soliman-Aga recognised me too, and though he was more sober in his demonstrations than his subordinate, he made me sit down by his side, offered me a pipe, and sent for coffee. I must add, as characteristic of the customs of the country, that the groom, thinking himself for the time being worthy of our company, also sat down on his crossed legs and received a long pipe and one of those little cups full of boiling *mocha* which have to be held in a gilded frame lest one should burn one's fingers. It was not long before we had a circle round us.

Abdullah, seeing that this recognition was taking a more respectable turn, at last appeared and condescended to look favourably upon our conversation. I knew Soliman-Aga for very good company, and although, during our voyage, we had only communicated in pantomime, our acquaintance had reached such a stage that I felt there could be no indiscretion

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in talking to him about my affairs, and asking his advice.

“*Machallah!*” cried he, without a moment’s hesitation. “The sheik is quite right. A young man like you ought to have been married several times already!”

“But you know,” I observed timidly, “those who belong to my religion are not allowed to marry more than one wife, and then she has to be kept for ever. So usually we take time to think the matter over; we hope to find the best possible.”

“Ah,” said he, tapping his forehead, “I do not talk about your *roumi* women. They belong to the whole world and not to you. The poor mad things show their faces completely bare, not only to him who cares to see them, but to him who does not. . . . Just think,” he added, roaring with laughter and turning to the other Turks who were listening, “all of them, in the streets, looked upon me with passion in their eyes, and some of them even pushed their immodesty so far as to wish to embrace me.”

Seeing that his hearers were scandalised to the last degree, I thought it my duty to explain to them for the honour of our women of Europe that Soliman-Aga was doubtless confusing the interested keenness of a certain type of woman with the quite virtuous curiosity of the majority.

“And,” said Soliman-Aga, without replying to my observation, which doubtless seemed dictated by national pride, “it would not be so bad if their beauties were worthy that one of the faithful should allow them to kiss his hand! But they are winter plants, no colour and no taste, with sickly faces, tormented by starvation, for they hardly eat anything, and I could hold their bodies between my two hands. As for marrying them! They have been so badly brought

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up that tumult and unhappiness would always be in the house. With us, the women live together and the men live together, which is the only way of securing tranquillity."

"But don't you live," I said, "among the women in your harems?"

"God Almighty!" he cried, "and have our heads split open by their eternal babble? Don't you see that here, men who have nothing to do spend their time out walking, at the baths, the cafés, the mosques, listening to stories, or visiting their friends? Isn't it pleasanter to chat with one's friends, listen to stories and poems, or to smoke dreamily, than to talk to women who can think about nothing but their own silly affairs, their gossip or their dress?"

"But you must put up with that when you take your meals with them."

"Not at all. They eat together or separately as they choose, and we, either alone, or with our relations and our friends. There are a certain number of the faithful, very few, who behave otherwise, but they are looked down upon, and lead a slack and wasted life. The company of women makes men greedy, selfish, and cruel; it destroys brotherly love and charity among us; it is the cause of quarrels, injustice and tyranny. Let each live with his like! It is enough that the master, at the hour of the siesta, or when he comes home at night, should find smiling faces to welcome him, and pleasing figures, handsomely adorned . . . and perhaps dancing girls to dance and sing before him. Then he can dream of paradise before its time, and fancy himself in the third heaven where dwell those pure and stainless beauties who alone are worthy to become the eternal spouses of a true believer."

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Is that what all Mussulmans think, or only a certain number of them? We should perhaps see in this point of view, not so much contempt for womanhood, as a certain relic of the platonism of antiquity, which raises pure love to a level above all perishable things. Is not the woman who is so adored an abstract phantom, the imperfect image of a divine woman, betrothed to the believer from all eternity? Such ideas have given rise to the belief that Orientals deny that woman has a soul, but we now know that devout Mussulman women themselves hope to see their ideal realised in heaven. The religious history of the Arabs is not without its women saints and prophetesses, and Mohammed's daughter, the famous Fatima, is queen of this feminine paradise.

Soliman-Aga ended by advising me to embrace the Mohammedan religion, and I thanked him, smiling, and promised to think the matter over. I was more embarrassed than ever. But I had still to consult the deaf painter of the Hôtel Domergue, as I had originally intended.

## V

### THE MOUSKY

After turning the corner, and leaving the buildings of the Stud on the left, one begins to realise the animation of this great city. The road which goes around the square of the Esbeckieh has no more than a scanty avenue of trees to protect one from the sun, but there are stone houses of considerable height and these break up the dusty rays which the sun casts upon one side of the street only. Usually, the place is very busy, very noisy, crowded with

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women selling oranges, bananas, and green sugar-cane, whose sweet pulp the people chew with great delight. Then, too, there are singers, wrestlers, and serpent-charmers with great snakes coiled about their necks, and one particular form of entertainment which seems to materialise some of the images in Rabelais' quaint fancies. A jolly old man dances on his knee little dolls like those of our Savoyards, with a thread running through the body, but the pantomimes which he makes them perform are by no means so decent. But they have nothing to do with the famous Caragueuz, who, as a rule, only appears in shadow-plays. A delighted crowd of women, children, and soldiers naively applauds these shameless marionettes. In another place is a man with some monkeys, who has trained a huge baboon to beat off with a stick the stray dogs which the children set upon him. Farther on, the road becomes narrower and darker, as the buildings become higher. On the left is the monastery of the dancing dervishes, who give a public performance every Tuesday; then we come to a gateway, over which is a large stuffed crocodile which marks the house whence set forth the carriages which cross the desert between Cairo and Suez. These carriages are very light, in shape rather like our prosaic one-horse cabs, so open that they let in all the wind and dust, though doubtless this cannot be helped. Their iron wheels have two sets of spokes, starting from either side of the hub and meeting on the narrow circle which serves as a rim. These strange-looking wheels cut through the ground rather than travel over it.

But let us go farther. On the right is a Christian tavern, a huge cellar where drinks are served upon the barrels. At the door is usually to be seen a man with a red face and long moustache, who represents with

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proper majesty the aboriginal *Frank*, or, to be more precise, that race which seems to be peculiar to the East. Who can say whence he originally came, whether from Malta, Italy, Spain or Marseilles? One thing, however, is certain, which is that his contempt for the costumes of the country, and his belief in the superiority of European attire, have inclined him to refinements in dress which give an element of originality to his somewhat ragged wardrobe. To a blue frock-coat whose frayed "anglaises" have long since been divorced from their buttons, he has thought fit to attach facings which interlace like those on a frogged coat. His red trousers come to an end in what is left of a pair of heavy boots with spurs. An enormous shirt collar, and a dilapidated white hat with green brim, tone down whatever might seem to be too martial in this costume, and restore its civil character. In his hand he holds a whip of ox sinew, to indicate a privilege confined to Franks and Turks, who make too frequent a use of it upon the shoulders of the poor, long-suffering *fellah*.

Almost immediately in front of the tavern, there is a narrow passage along which crawls a beggar without hands and feet. The poor devil craves the charity of the English who seem to pass every moment, for the Hôtel Waghorn is situated in this dark alley, which, moreover, leads to the Cairo theatre, and M. Bonhomme's reading-room, which is brought to one's notice by a huge sign in French. All the delights of civilization are assembled here, and there is certainly nothing calculated to arouse too great an envy in the Arabs. As we continue our way, we come, upon the left, to a house with a handsome façade, sculptured and adorned with painted arabesques, the first thing we have yet seen to give any satisfaction to an artist

## THE MOUSKY

or a poet. Then there is a sharp bend in the road, and for twenty paces one has to fight one's way amid a countless stream of donkeys, dogs and camels, men selling cucumbers and women selling bread. The donkeys gallop, the camels low, the dogs stay steadily in serried ranks before the doors of three butchers. There would be a certain Arab atmosphere about this little corner, if there were not straight before one the sign of a *trattoria* filled with Italians and Maltese.

And now, with all its wealth displayed before us, is the great business street of the Frankish quarter, commonly called the Mousky. The first part of it, half covered with boards and canvas, shows us two rows of well-filled shops, where all the European nations offer for sale their staple products. England takes the lead in household utensils and cloth, Germany in fabrics, France in millinery, Marseilles in groceries, dried meats and odds and ends of all kinds. I do not include Marseilles with the rest of France, for in the Levant one very quickly discovers that the people of Marseilles form a nation apart; in the most favourable sense, be it understood.

Among the shops where European industry does its best to attract the wealthiest inhabitants of Cairo, the reformist Turks, the Copts and the Greeks, who accommodate themselves most readily to our customs, there is an English tavern where one may go and try to counteract, with the help of Madeira, porter or ale, the sometimes emollient effect of the Nile water. Another place where one may take refuge from the life of the East is Castagnol's pharmacy where, very often, the *bey*s, *muchirs* and *nazirs* who began life in Paris come to chat with travellers, and get into touch once more with their native land. It is no surprising thing to see the chairs in the laboratory, and even the

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benches outside, occupied by men who might be Orientals, their chests covered with decorations, who talk French and read the newspapers whilst their sayces hold mettlesome horses ready at any moment they may be called for, with saddles embroidered in gold. This gathering may also be accounted for by the nearness of the Frankish post office, which is in the passage that leads to the Hôtel Domergue. Every day, people come to wait for letters and news, which come more or less occasionally according to the condition of the roads, or the diligence of the messengers. The English steam packet goes up the Nile only once a month.

I was nearing the end of my journey, for, at Castagnol's pharmacy, I met the painter from the French hotel, who was having chlorate of gold prepared for his daguerreotype. He suggested that I should go with him to find a subject in the town; so I dismissed my dragoman, who hastened to instal himself in the English tavern, for, I very much fear from contact with the masters he had before me, he has acquired an immoderate liking for strong beer and whiskey.

When I agreed to take this walk with the painter, I really had it in my mind to do something still more delightful: to have myself taken to the busiest part of the city, and then to leave the painter to his work and wander wherever the fancy took me, without an interpreter and without a companion. So far, I had never been able to manage this, for my dragoman pretended that I could not do without him, while all the Europeans I had met suggested that they should show me the "sights of the town." To know exactly what this hypocritical suggestion means, you should have travelled a little in the South. You imagine



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that the kind resident makes himself your guide out of pure kindness of heart. Nothing of the sort! He has nothing else to do; he is horribly bored; he needs you as an amusement, to make conversation for him, and he will never show you anything that you could not have found for yourself at any time. He does not even know his own town; he has not the slightest idea of what goes on in it; he is simply seeking a pretext for a walk and a way of boring you with his remarks while he amuses himself with yours. Besides, what is a beautiful view, a monument, a curious detail, if you do not come upon it unexpectedly, if there is no element of chance about it?

It is one of the curious ideas which Europeans have at Cairo that they cannot go ten steps without a donkey and a donkey man. I agree that the donkeys are very fine, that they trot and gallop marvellously. The donkey man acts as a cavass and forces a way through the crowd shouting: "*Ha! ha! iniglac! smalac!*" which means: "To the left there! To the right!" Since women are either deafer or less intelligent than other passers-by, the donkey man is always shouting "*Ia bent!*" ("Hey! woman!") in an imperious tone which makes manifest the superiority of the male sex.

## VI

### AN ADVENTURE IN THE BESESTAIN

So we rode along, the painter and I, with a donkey behind us carrying the camera, a complicated and delicate machine which must be set up somewhere in such a way as to do us honour. After the street which I have described, we came to

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a passage roofed with boards, where the European merchant sets forth his choicest products. It is a kind of bazaar, and with it the Frankish quarter comes to an end. We turned to the right, then to the left, the crowd surrounding us growing ever larger, and proceeded down a long regular street, wherein the curious may from time to time look upon mosques, fountains, a monastery of dervishes, and a whole bazaar of ironmongery and English porcelain. After a thousand turnings, the road became more silent, more dusty, more deserted; the mosques were falling into ruin, the houses crumbling. The noise and tumult ceased but for a band of howling dogs, which pursued our donkeys relentlessly, and more relentlessly still our horrible black European clothes. Then fortunately, we went through a gate and changed our quarter, and the dogs stopped and howled at the extreme edge of their own domain. The city is divided into fifty-three quarters, each with a wall around it. Some of these quarters belong to the Copts, Greeks, Turks, Jews, and Franks. The dogs themselves, which swarm in peace throughout the town without belonging to anyone in particular, recognise these divisions and would not venture beyond them without danger. A new canine escort soon replaced that which had left us, and conducted us to the *casinos* which stand upon the banks of a canal that passes through Cairo, called the *Calish*.

We were now in a kind of suburb cut off from the main quarters of the town by the canal. Many cafés or casinos stand upon the inner shore, while upon the farther is a fairly broad boulevard which a few dusty palm trees try to make more cheerful. The water in the canal is rather stagnant, but a long line of arbours and trellises, festooned by vines and creepers, which

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serves as a back room to the cafés, is most pleasing to the eye, while the smooth surface of the water which surrounds them fondly reflects the varied costumes of the smokers. The lamps in the chandeliers are lighted even in the day-time; the crystal narghiles glitter, and there are waves of amber liquid in the cups which negroes hand round in frames of golden filigree.

After staying a short time at one of these cafés, we crossed to the other bank of the *Calish*, and set upon its legs the apparatus which enables the god of day to assume the agreeable rôle of landscape painter. A ruined mosque with a quaintly sculptured minaret; a dainty palm tree, springing from a clump of mastics—here was surely enough to form the subject of a painting worthy of Marilhat. My companion was delighted, and while the sun was doing its work upon his freshly polished plates, I thought I might well carry on an instructive conversation, asking him, with the help of a pencil, questions which his infirmity did not prevent him from answering *viva voce*.

“Do not get married,” he cried, “and, above all, do not take the turban. What is it they want you to do? To have a woman in your house. There is nothing in that. I have as many as I could wish. Those orange-sellers in their blue tunics, with their bracelets and their silver necklets, are very beautiful. They have exactly the form of the Egyptian statues, a well developed chest, splendid shoulders and arms, slender hips, and fine shapely legs. There is archæology for you! All they need is a sparrow-hawk head-dress, fillets round their body, and an ansated cross in their hand, and you have Isis or Athor.”

“But,” said I, “you forget that I am not an artist, and, moreover, those women already have husbands or

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families. They are veiled; how am I to tell whether they are beautiful or not? I don't know a single word of Arabic yet. How am I to woo them?"

"Gallantry is severely forbidden at Cairo, but there is no sort of ban upon love. You will meet some woman whose walk, whose figure, whose manner of wearing her clothes, or something which disarranges her veil or her head-dress, suggests youth or the desire to appear complaisant. Simply follow her, and if she looks straight at you when she thinks the crowd is not watching her, go home and she will come after you. When you are concerned with women, you must rely upon yourself alone. The dragomans will serve you badly: take the risk yourself. It is safer."

I left the painter to his work, surrounded by a respectful crowd who imagined him to be occupied in magical proceedings. Why should I, I thought to myself, have given up the idea that I might please? The women are veiled, but I am not. My European complexion may be attractive in this country. In France, I should be accounted a very ordinary individual, but in Cairo, I become one of the charming children of the North. This Frankish costume, which sets the dogs barking, at least serves to draw attention to me, and that is something.

I went back to the crowded streets, pushing my way through people astonished to see a Frank on foot and without a guide in the Arab part of the city. I stopped at the doors of shops and workshops, looking at everything with the air of a harmless sightseer. It attracted only smiles. People said to themselves: "He has lost his dragoman; perhaps he has not enough money to take a donkey . . ."; they were sorry for a stranger lost in the tremendous labyrinth of streets, in such a multitude of bazaars. I stopped to watch three

## AN ADVENTURE IN THE BESESTAIN

smiths at work. They seemed like men of copper. They sang an Arab song, the rhythm of which guided them in the succession of strokes they beat upon pieces of metal which a child brought to the anvil one after another. It made me shudder to think that if one of them missed even half a beat, the child would have his hand smashed. Two women had stopped behind me and were laughing at my curiosity. I turned round and saw quite clearly by their mantillas of black silk and their cloaks of green levantine, that they did not belong to the class of orange-sellers in the Mousky. I set off in front of them, but they lowered their veils, and went another way. Then I followed them, and soon we came to a long street, with a number of very fine bazaars, which runs right across the city. We entered a splendid vaulted passage, made by beams carved in the ancient manner, painted and gilded in such a way as to bring out a host of details in the glorious arabesques. This might even be that very *besestain* of the Circassians which was the scene of the story told to the Sultan of Kashgar by the Coptic merchant. I was back again in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Why might I not be one of the young merchants whom the two ladies request to show their goods, as the Emir's daughter did at Bedreddin's shop? I would say to them: "I pray you, let me see your face in return for this fabric with the flowers of gold, and I shall be repaid with interest." But they disdained the silks of Beyrouth, the brodered stuffs of Damascus, the *mandilles* from Broussa, which every salesman offers in profusion. There are no shops in this place, only plain stalls, with shelves mounting to the roof, and a sign above, covered with letters and emblems in gold. The merchant, with crossed legs, smokes his long pipe or his narghile

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on a narrow bench, and the women go from merchant to merchant, contenting themselves, when they have made one man display all he has, with moving on to the next, with a disdainful glance.

My laughing beauties absolutely insisted upon having materials from Constantinople. Constantinople leads the fashions of Cairo. When they were shown some hideous printed muslins, and the salesman said "*Istamboldan*" ("This is from Stamboul"), they uttered cries of admiration. Women are everywhere the same.

I approached with the air of one who knows, lifted a corner of some yellow material with dark red stripes, and cried: "*Tayeb!*" ("That is pretty!") My remark appeared to please, and they decided to buy the stuff. The merchant measured it with a kind of foot-rule called a *pic*, and a little boy was told to carry the roll.

For once I really thought one of the young ladies looked straight at me. Moreover, their hesitation, the laughter they stifled when they turned and saw me following them, the occasional raising of their black mantillas (*habbarahs*) in such a way that I caught sight of a white mask, a sign that they belonged to the upper classes, all those apparently undecided gestures which a domino at the Opera ball makes when she wishes to seduce you, seemed to show that they were not animated by any too unfriendly feelings towards me. I felt that the moment had arrived when I should pass them, and show them the direction of my own abode. But how was I to find it? There are no sign-posts in the Cairo streets; the houses have no numbers; each quarter has its own walls round it, and itself forms a labyrinth as complex as you can imagine. For one street that has an end there are ten which lead nowhere. So, in my doubt, I con-

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tinued to follow the ladies. We left the bazaars, full of noise and light, where everything glitters and sparkles, where the splendour of the stalls forms a delightful contrast to the architectural beauties and the glory of the principal mosques with their horizontal bands of yellow and red. Now we came to vaulted passages, dark, narrow alleys, with casement windows hanging over them, just like the streets of our own Middle Ages. The coolness of these almost subterranean passages affords a pleasant shelter from the heat of the Egyptian sun, and gives the population many of the advantages of a temperate climate. It explains the smooth fairness which so many of the women preserve beneath their veils, for a considerable number of them have never left the city except for an outing beneath the trees of Schoubrah.

But what was I to think of all the turnings and twistings which the ladies made me take? Were they running away from me or leading me on, in this adventurous expedition? We finally came into a street which I had passed through the evening before: I recognised it by the delicious scent which came from the yellow flowers of an arbutus tree. The sun loves this tree which puts forth above the wall branches clothed with perfumed clusters. There is a low fountain at the corner of the street, which some good soul has had put there for the delight of thirsty dogs. We reached a handsome house, with ornaments in plaster. One of the ladies put into the lock one of those rustic keys with which I was already familiar. I set off after them down the gloomy corridor without hesitation, even without a thought, and found myself in a large and silent courtyard, with galleries around it, and above all, the thousand fretted ornaments of the *moucharabys*.

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### VII

#### A DANGEROUS HOUSE

The ladies disappeared in some dark staircase at the gateway, and I turned round, meaning to go back again. An Abyssinian slave, tall and strong-looking, was busy shutting it. I tried to think of some word to convince him that I had mistaken the house, and that I had thought I was going into my own, but the word *Tayeb*, however universal a means of expression, did not seem to me quite sufficient to express all these things. Meanwhile, there was a great to-do back in the house; startled sayces came out of the stables, red caps appeared at the galleries on the first floor, and a most majestic Turk advanced from the end of the principal of them.

At such a moment as this, the worst thing one can do is to do nothing. I reflected that many Mussulmans understand the language of the Franks, which is nothing but a mixture of words taken from a number of the dialects of the south, which one employs haphazard until one succeeds in making oneself understood. It is the language of the Turks of Molière. So I put together all the Italian, Spanish, Provençal and Greek words I knew, and composed a very captious oration. After all, I said to myself, my intentions are pure. One, at least, of the women may well be his daughter or his sister. I marry her; I take the turban. There are many things that cannot be avoided. I believe in fate.

The Turk seemed to be a good-natured fellow; his well-nourished face did not appear to indicate that he was particularly cruel. His eyes twinkled with a



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certain air of malice when he heard me putting together the most extraordinary collection of words which had ever been heard in any city of the Levant. Then he held out a plump hand, covered with rings. "My dear sir, do come in; then we shall be able to talk much more at our ease."

This good Turk was as much a Frenchman as I was!

We went into a very fine room, the windows of which looked out over gardens, and sat down upon a rich divan. Coffee and pipes were brought. We talked. I explained as best I could how I had come into his house under the impression that I was entering one of those many passages which, at Cairo, pass through the main blocks of the houses, but I realised from his smile that my fair unknown ones had had time to betray me. This did not prevent our conversation from very quickly becoming intimate. In Turkish countries, fellow-countrymen soon become acquainted. My host was kind enough to ask me to dine with him, and when the time came, two very beautiful ladies appeared, one of whom was his wife and the other his wife's sister. They were the ladies of the Circassian bazaar, and both French. Could anything have been more humiliating? They scolded me for going through the city without a dragoman or a donkey-man, and made fun of my assiduous pursuit of two unknown women, whose forms were obviously invisible, and who might have been old women or negresses for all I knew. The ladies were not in the least grateful to me for my chance selection of themselves, wherein none of their charms had played a part, for it must be owned that the black *habbarah*, less attractive than the veil of the simple fellah women, makes a shapeless bundle of every woman, and when

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the wind gets into it, gives her the appearance of a half-inflated balloon.

After dinner, which was served entirely in the French style, I was taken into a much richer room, with walls covered with painted porcelain, and cornices of carved cedar. In the centre of it a marble fountain cast little jets of water into the air; carpets and Venetian mirrors completed the ideal of Arabic luxury, but a surprise which awaited me soon claimed my whole attention. Around an oval table were eight young girls, doing different kinds of work. They rose, saluted me, and the two youngest came and kissed my hands, a ceremony which I knew one must never decline at Cairo. But what I found most astonishing about this charming picture was that the complexion of these young people, dressed in the Eastern style, varied from tan to olive, and, in the case of the last, the deepest chocolate. Before the fairest of them it might have been undesirable to quote Goethe's lines:

*"Knowest thou the land where the citrons ripen?"*

However, they might all have passed for beauties of mixed race. The mistress of the house and her sister sat down upon the divan laughing heartily at my admiration. The two little girls brought us liqueurs and coffee.

I was infinitely grateful to my host for having introduced me to his harem, but I said to myself that a Frenchman would never make a good Turk, and that the self-satisfaction he might obtain from showing off his mistresses or his wives must always be overshadowed by the fear that he was exposing them to seduction. But I was deceived on this point too. These charming flowers of varied hue were not the wives but the

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daughters of the house. My host belonged to that generation of soldiers which devoted its existence to the service of Napoleon. Rather than allow themselves to be recognised as subjects of the Restoration, many of these good fellows went and offered their services to the rulers of the Orient. India and Egypt welcomed many of them, for in those two countries there were many pleasing memories of the glory of France. Some adopted the religion and the customs of the peoples who gave them refuge. How can we blame them? The majority of them, born during the Revolution, had known hardly any other form of religion than that of the Theophilanthropists or the masonic lodges. Mohammedanism, seen in the countries where it prevails, has a greatness which affects even the most sceptical of minds. My host, when he was still young, had yielded to these seductions of a new country. By his talents he had reached the rank of bey; his seraglio had been recruited from the beauties of Sennaar, Abyssinia, and even Arabia, for he had taken part in the deliverance of the holy cities from the yoke of Mussulman schismatics. Then, when he grew older, the ideas of Europe had come back to him; he married the charming daughter of a consul, and, like the great Soliman when he married Roxelana, dismissed all his seraglio and kept the children. These were his daughters; the boys were studying in military schools.

In a house with so many marriageable daughters, I felt that hospitality might present certain dangers, and I did not venture to say what my position really was until I had found out something more definite.

In the evening I was taken home, and I have retained the most charming memories of this adventure. But, in truth, it was hardly worth the trouble of

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going to Cairo in order to ally myself in marriage to some French family.

The next day, Abdullah came and asked permission to go with some English people as far as Suez. It would take a week, and I had no wish to deprive him of such a lucrative opportunity. I suspected that he was not too well pleased about my behaviour the night before. A traveller who goes all day without a dragoman, who roams on foot throughout the streets of Cairo, and then dines, no one knows where, runs the risk of being taken for a very doubtful character. To take his place Abdullah brought a *barbarin* friend of his called Ibrahim. The *barbarin* (the name of an ordinary servant) only knew a little of the dialect of Malta.

### VIII

#### THE WÉKIL

The Jew Yousef, my acquaintance of the cotton bazaar, came every day to sit upon my divan, and perfect himself in French conversation.

"I have heard," said he, "that you are in need of a wife, and so I have found a *wékil* for you."

"A *wékil*!"

"Yes, the word means an envoy, an ambassador; in this case, an honest man whose business it is to come to an arrangement with the parents of marriageable daughters. He will either bring them to you, or take you to them."

"Oh! oh! and what sort of young ladies are these?"

"Good, respectable people. Indeed there are no others in Cairo, since His Highness has packed off the other sort to Esné, a little below the first cataract."

## THE WÉKIL

"I am quite ready to believe it. Well, we shall see. Bring your *wékil* along."

"I have brought him: he is downstairs."

The *wékil* was a blind man, whom his son, a tall and lusty fellow, guided most dutifully. We all four mounted donkeys, and I had much secret amusement comparing the blind man to Cupid, and his son to the god of marriage. The Jew, who was not interested in mythological allusions, gave me much information as we went along.

"Here," said he, "there are four ways of getting married. The first is to marry a Coptic girl before the *Turk*."

"And who is the *Turk*?"

"He is a good *santon* (monk) to whom you give a little money. He says a prayer, assists you before the *cadi*, and performs the functions of a priest. These men are regarded as holy, and everything they do is right. They do not bother about your religion, if you do not trouble about theirs. But marriages of that sort are not the thing in the case of very respectable girls."

"Well, let us try another."

"This is a serious form of marriage. You are a Christian and so are the Copts. There are Coptic priests who will marry you though you are a schismatic, on condition that you set apart a dowry for the woman, in case you should divorce her later."

"That sounds reasonable enough, but how much is the dowry?"

"That depends upon the terms agreed, but never less than two hundred *piastres*."

"Two pounds! My word! It doesn't cost much to get married."

"There is still another kind of marriage for those

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who are troubled by scruples, like those of good family. You are betrothed before the Coptic priest; he marries you according to the rites and ceremonies of his religion, and then you can never be divorced."

"Oh ! but that is indeed a serious business."

"Excuse me, but you must also settle upon a dowry beforehand in case you should leave the country."

"The woman becomes free then?"

"Yes, certainly, and you too, but you are bound so long as you remain in the country."

"Well, that seems reasonable enough. What about the fourth kind of marriage?"

"I don't recommend you to consider that. You are then married twice, once at the Coptic church and once at the Franciscan monastery."

"A mixed marriage?"

"A very solid marriage ! If you go away, you must take the woman with you ; she can follow you all round the world and set her children in your arms."

"So that is final; you are married beyond repair?"

"There are still ways and means of slipping causes for nullity into the document, but one thing you must avoid at all costs. Don't let yourself be taken before the Consul."

"But that is a European marriage."

"Exactly. There is only one thing you can do in that case. If you know anyone at the Consulate, make sure that the banns are not published in your own country."

I was astounded at the depth of knowledge which this cultivator of silkworms displayed on the question of marriage, but he told me that he had often been employed in matters of the sort. He acted as an interpreter for the *wékil*, who only knew Arabic. I was intensely interested.

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We had nearly reached the outskirts of the city, in that part of the Coptic quarter which backs upon the Esbekieh on the Boulaq side. The place where the presentation was to take place was a mean-looking house at the end of a street crowded with people selling herbs and fritters. I was told that this was not the parents' house, but neutral ground.

"You are going to see two," said the Jew to me, "and if they do not satisfy you, we will have others brought."

"Excellent! but I warn you, if they remain veiled, no marriage for me."

"Oh, don't let that disturb you. We are not with the Turks here."

"The Turks have the advantage of being able to find safety in numbers."

"Yes, it is really quite different."

The lower room of the house was occupied by three or four men in blue smocks who seemed to be asleep. But since the city gate was not far away, and a military post was stationed there, there was no cause for alarm. We went up a stone staircase to an inner gallery. The room we then entered looked out upon the street, and the broad window, with its carved grill, stood out a foot or more beyond the house. Once seated in this sort of cupboard, one can look down to both ends of the street, and watch the passers-by through openings at the side. Usually it is the women's favourite place, from which, without being seen themselves, they can see all that goes on. I was invited to sit down there, while the *wékil*, his son and the Jew seated themselves on the divans. Soon there came a veiled Coptic woman who, after greeting us, raised her black *borghot* right above her head, producing, with the veil thrown back, the effect of an Israelitish head-dress. This

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was the *khathé* or *wékil* of the women. She told me that the young people were finishing their dressing. Meanwhile, pipes and coffee had been brought for everybody. A man with a white beard, wearing a black turban, had also joined our company. It was the Coptic priest. Two women in veils, doubtless the mothers, remained standing at the door.

The matter began to assume a serious aspect, and my expectation was, I admit, tinged with a certain amount of anxiety. At last, two young girls came in and advanced in turn to kiss my hand. I made signs to them to sit beside me.

"Let them stand," said the Jew, "they are your servants."

But I was too much of a Frenchman not to insist. The Jew spoke, and doubtless gave them to understand that it was a queer custom of the Europeans to allow women to sit in their presence. Finally they sat down beside me.

They were dressed in flowered silk and embroidered muslin. It was all very springlike. Their head-gear, consisting of a red cap with little lace cords twined around it, allowed a host of ribbons and silk tresses to escape from beneath it; bunches of little pieces of gold and silver, probably imitation, completely hid the hair. However, it was easy to see that one was dark and the other fair; they had taken care to forestall every conceivable objection. The first was "slender as a palm tree with eyes as dark as the gazelle's," with a slightly dark skin; the other, more delicate, richer in contours, and so white that I was astonished, considering the latitude, had the demeanour and the carriage of a young and blooming queen in the country of the morning.

This one I found particularly attractive, and I had all sorts of pretty things said to her, without, however,



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entirely neglecting her companion. Time passed without my coming to grips with the all-important question, and at last the *khatbé* made them rise, and uncovered their shoulders, striking them with her hand to show how firm they were. For a moment I feared lest the exhibition should go too far, and in front of these poor girls whose hands were gathering the thin silken stuff about their almost too visible charms, I was myself a little embarrassed. At last the Jew said to me:

“What do you think?”

“One of them I like very much, but I should like to think about the matter: one does not fall straightway in love: we will come back and see them again.”

Those who were present would certainly have preferred a more definite answer. The *khatbé* and the Coptic priest urged me to come to a decision. Finally I rose, promising that I would return, but I felt that they did not really believe me. During these negotiations, the two young girls had gone out. When I went along the gallery to regain the staircase, the one whom I had particularly noticed, seemed busy arranging the plants. She rose smiling, and letting her cap fall, shook over her shoulders magnificent golden tresses, to which the sun gave a bright reddish tint. This last effort at coquetry, quite legitimate as it was, almost overcame my prudence, and I told the family that I would certainly send presents.

“Really!” I said to the complaisant Israelite, as we went out, “I would not mind marrying her before the Turk.”

“Her mother would not agree. They insist upon having the Coptic priest. They are a family of scribes. The father is dead, and the girl you preferred has only been married once so far, though she is sixteen years old.”

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“What ! she is a widow ?”

“No, divorced.”

“Oh, but that puts a different aspect on the case !”

However, I sent a small piece of material as a present.

The blind man and his son once more got busy, and found other brides for me. There was almost always the same sort of performance, but I enjoyed this review of the Coptic fair sex, and, for a few pieces of material and some bits of jewellery, too much fuss was not made about my hesitations. There was one mother who brought her daughter to my house, and I have reason to believe that this one would gladly have been wedded before the Turk; but, all things considered, that girl was old enough to have been married already more than was fitting.

## IX

### THE GARDEN OF ROSETTA

The *barbarin* whom Abdallah had left in his place, perhaps a little jealous of the attentions of the Jew and his *wékil*, one day brought to me a very well-dressed young man who spoke Italian and was called Mohammed, who had a most desirable marriage to propose to me.

“This one,” said he, “means going before the Consul. They are wealthy people, and the girl is only twelve years old.”

“It is a little young for me; but it seems that here it is the only age at which one does not run the risk of finding them either widows or divorcees.”

“*Signor, e vero !* They are very anxious to see you, for you live in a house where English people used to

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live, and so they have a very high opinion of your rank. I told them you were a general."

"But I am not a general."

"Oh come! You are not a workman or a business man. You have no occupation, have you?"

"Nothing worth speaking of."

"Well then! That is at least as good as being a *myrliva* (general)."

I already knew that in Cairo, as in Russia, everybody's position in life was graded according to military rank. There are writers at Paris who might have considered it a very slight distinction to be put in the same class as an Egyptian general, but in my own case I could see nothing less than oriental exaggeration. We mounted our donkeys and went towards the Mousky. Mohammed knocked at the door of a house which seemed respectable enough. A negress opened the door and uttered cries of joy; another black slave leaned over the banisters of the staircase in her curiosity, clapped her hands and laughed at the top of her voice, and I heard the sound of conversations, the only part of which I was able to gather being that the *myrliva* had come.

On the first floor, I found a well-dressed man, wearing a cashmere turban, who asked me to be seated, and presented to me a tall young man who, he said, was his son. He himself was the father. At the same moment there appeared a woman of about thirty years of age, still beautiful. Coffee and pipes were brought, and I learned through the interpreter that they belonged to Upper Egypt, which gave the father the right to wear a white turban. A moment later, the young girl arrived, with negress attendants who waited outside the door. From their hands she took a dish, and served us with conserves in a crystal jar into which

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we dined with spoons of silver gilt. So small and dainty was she that I could not imagine how anyone could dream of her marriage. Her features were not yet quite formed, but she was so like her mother, that, judging from her mother's face, it was possible to imagine how pretty she was likely to be. She had been sent to school in the Frankish quarter, and already knew a few words of Italian. The whole family appeared so respectable that I was sorry I had allowed myself to be introduced to it without any really genuine intentions. They showed me every kind of courtesy, and I left them, promising that they should have a very early decision. There was indeed every reason why I should treat the matter seriously.

The next day but one was the Jewish Passover, which fell upon the same day as our Palm Sunday. In the place of box, as in Europe, all the Christians carried the palm branches of the Bible, and the streets were full of children picking up palm leaves. In order to reach the Frankish quarter, I passed through the garden of Rosetta, the most delightful place for a walk in all Cairo. It forms a vast oasis among the dusty houses at the edge of the Coptic quarter and the Mousky. On one side of this pleasant spot are the houses of two Consuls and Doctor Clot-Bey, and houses belonging to Franks, which stand in the alley where the Hotel Waghorn is, reach to the other end of it. In between, there is space enough to provide a wooded vista of date-trees, orange-trees and sycamores.

It is not easy to find one's way into this mysterious Eden, for it has no public entrance. One must pass through the house belonging to the Consul of Sardinia, giving a few paras to his servants, and then one finds oneself amid orchards and gardens belonging to the neighbouring houses. A foot-path which separates

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them leads to a small farm with railings all round it, where there are several giraffes which Doctor Clot-Bey has bred under the care of some Nubians. A very thick grove of orange-trees stretches more to the left of the road, and on the right is a plantation of mulberry-trees, with maize between them. Then the road turns, and the open space on this side ends in a curtain of palm-trees and bananas with their long bright green leaves. Here, there is a pavilion supported upon high pillars, which covers a square basin around which companies of women often come to rest and seek refreshment. On Friday, the Mussulman women come, always veiled as closely as possible; on Saturday, the Jewesses; on Sunday, the Christians. On the last two days, the veils are a little less discreet. Many women have a carpet stretched out near the basin by their slaves, and have fruits and cakes served to them. A passer-by can sit down in the pavilion without being warned of his indiscretion by a wild scamper, as sometimes happens on a Friday, the Turkish day.

I was passing this place when a good-looking boy came delightedly up to me, and I recognised the brother of my last intended. I was alone. He made a few signs which I did not understand, and finally, by means of a pantomime of more obvious meaning, invited me to wait for him in the pavilion. Ten minutes later, the door of one of the little gardens which belong to the houses opened, and through it came two women with the young man. They came and sat down by the pool, and raised their veils. They were his mother and his sister. Their house looked out upon the promenade, on the opposite side from that which I had entered two days before. After greeting one another in a friendly way, we sat there looking at one another, occasionally uttering some word or other, and smiling

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at our mutual ignorance. The little girl said nothing at all, doubtless out of shyness; but, remembering that she was learning Italian, I essayed a few words in that language, to which she replied with the guttural accent of the Arabs, which made the conversation very unenlightening.

I tried to explain what I found singular in the resemblance between the two women. One was the miniature of the other. The still vague features of the child were more sharply defined in the mother: between the two ages there would undoubtedly be a delightful season which it would be charming to watch in process of development. Near us there was the trunk of a palm-tree which had been blown down some days before: its branches dipped over the edge of the basin. I pointed to them, saying: *Oggi è il giorno delle palme*. Now the Coptic festivals, which are decided by the primitive calendar of the Church, do not fall on the same days as ours. But the little girl went and gathered a branch which she kept in her hand, and said *Io così sono Roumi* (I, too, am a Roman).

From the Egyptian point of view, all Franks are "Romans," so I might take her remark for a compliment, and an allusion to our future marriage. O Hymen, Hymenæa! I was very near to you that day! According to our European notions, you are doubtless nothing more than a younger brother of love. But would it not be delightful to see the wife whom one has chosen grow and develop by one's side; to take the father's place for a while before becoming the lover! But what a danger for the husband!

When I left the garden, I felt that I must go and consult my Cairo friends. I went to see Soliman-Aga. "Get married, by God!" said he, as Pantagruel to Panurge. From him I went to the painter of the

## THE GARDEN OF ROSETTA

Hotel Domergue, and he shouted at me, in the way that deaf men have, "Don't marry if it means going before the Consul."

A certain religious prejudice seems to dominate the European in the East, at least when serious questions are concerned. To marry *à la cophite*, as they say at Cairo, is as simple a business as can be, but in the case of one who is still quite a child, who is delivered over to you, so to speak, who contracts what is to you an illusory bond, is assuredly a grave moral responsibility.

While I was given over to these delicate sentiments, Abdullah returned from Suez, and I told him the situation.

"I was sure," said he, "that while I was away they would take advantage of the opportunity to make you do something foolish. Have you thought about the dot?"

"Oh, that does not worry me. I know that won't amount to much here."

"They speak of twenty thousand piastres (two hundred pounds)."

"Well, that *is* something."

"Yes, but it is you who have to pay it."

"Then it's a very different business. Do you mean I have to pay the dot, instead of receiving it?"

"Of course! Didn't you know that such is the custom here?"

"Well . . . since they talked about the European kind of marriage . . ."

"Marriage . . . yes; but you have still to pay. It is a slight consolation to the family."

Ever after that, I understood the eagerness of parents in this country to marry off their children. And indeed, so far as I can see, nothing is more reasonable than to recognise, by a suitable payment, the trouble

## COPTIC MARRIAGES

which the good people have been at to bring up for your especial benefit a delightful, well-made child. It seems that the dot, or rather the dowry, the minimum of which I have mentioned before, increases with the beauty of the bride and the position of the parents. Add to this the expenses of the wedding, and you will see that a marriage *à la copte* becomes a still more expensive affair. I was sorry that the last one which was proposed to me was, at that moment, more than I could afford. Besides, Abdullah assured me that for the same sum it would be possible to acquire a whole seraglio in the slave bazaar.



## PART II

### THE SLAVES

#### I

#### SUNRISE

WHAT a strange thing life is! Every morning, in that condition of semi-slumber wherein reason gradually gains the mastery over the wild pictures of our dreams, I feel that it is natural, logical, and in keeping with my Parisian origin, that I should wake up in the dim light of a grey sky, to the sound of wheels rattling over the paved streets, in a gloomy room filled with clumsy furniture, in which the imagination beats against the windows like an imprisoned insect, so that it is with an ever more lively sense of astonishment that I find myself a thousand leagues from my native land, gradually allowing my senses to respond to the vague impressions of a world which is a perfect antithesis to our own. The voice of the Turk who chants upon the neighbouring minaret; the little bell and the heavy trot of the passing camel, and sometimes his strange lowing; the murmurs and indistinct sounds which give life to the air, the wood and the walls; the rapid dawn which reproduces upon the ceiling the multitudinous openings of the fretted windows; the morning breeze laden with penetrating odours, which lifts the curtain of my door, and shows me above the courtyard walls the waving tops of the palm-trees—all this surprises me, delights me . . . or

## THE SLAVES

saddens me, according to the day, for I do not suggest that an eternal summer always makes life merry. The black sun of melancholy which casts its gloomy rays upon the forehead of Albert Durer's dreaming angel, sometimes rises too on the luminous plains of the Nile, just as it does on the banks of the Rhine, in some cold German countryside. I will even admit that when there is no fog, the dust may hide the brightness of an Eastern day beneath a veil of gloom.

Sometimes I go upon the terrace of my house in the Coptic quarter to see the first rays caressing, far away, the plain of Heliopolis and the slopes of Mokatam, where is the City of the Dead, between Cairo and Matarea. Usually, it is a splendid sight, as the dawn gradually colours the cupolas and delicate arches of the tombs consecrated to the three dynasties of caliphs, soldars and sultans who have ruled Egypt since the year 1000. Only one of the obelisks of the ancient temple of the sun is still standing; it rises from a thick clump of palm-trees and sycamores, and is always favoured by the first glance of the god who once was worshipped at its feet.

Dawn in Egypt has not those exquisite golden tints we admire in the Cyclades, or upon the coast of Crete. The sun suddenly bursts forth at the edge of the sky, and only a vague white light goes before it. Sometimes, it seems to find difficulty in escaping from the long folds of a greyish shroud, and appears pale and almost without rays, like Osiris beneath the earth. Then its faded imprint makes the dry sky more melancholy still, and at such a time it is so like the cloudy skies of our own Europe that it might easily be taken for them, though instead of bringing rain it absorbs all moisture. This thick powder which fills the horizon never breaks up into fresh clouds like our mists; the sun

## SUNRISE

at its highest point can hardly succeed in piercing through the ashy atmosphere, and then it looks like a great red disk which might have come from the Lybian forges of the god Pta. At such a time we are able to understand the profound melancholy of ancient Egypt, that continual preoccupation with suffering and the tomb which the monuments have brought down to us. Typhon, for a time, triumphs over the beneficent deities; he irritates the eyes, dries up the lungs, and scatters clouds of insects over the fields and over the orchards.

I saw them pass like messengers of death and famine; the atmosphere laden with them, and looking upwards, for want of anything with which to compare them, took them at first for flocks of birds. Abdullah, who was upon the terrace with me, made a circle in the air with the long stem of his pipe, and two or three of them fell upon the floor. He shook his head as he looked at these enormous green and red grasshoppers. "Have you ever eaten them?" he said.

I could not prevent myself from making a gesture of repugnance at such an idea; yet, if their wings and feet were taken off, they must be very like shrimps.

"In the desert," said Abdullah, "they are a very important source of nourishment; they are smoked and salted, and have very much the flavour of a smoked herring. With doura paste they make very agreeable eating."

"Speaking of food," said I, "would it not be possible for me to have a taste of Egyptian cooking here? I find it very troublesome to have to go twice a day to take my meals at the hotel."

"You are right," said Abdullah, "you should engage a cook."

"Well, can't the *barbarin* do a little cooking?"

## THE SLAVES

"Certainly not! He is here to open the door and keep the house clean, and that's all."

"What about yourself? Aren't you capable of putting a piece of meat on the fire, or getting something ready?"

"Are you asking me?" cried Abdullah in a very hurt voice. "No, sir, I can't do anything like that."

"What a pity!" I continued, as though I had been joking. "We might have breakfasted upon some of these grasshoppers this morning, but, seriously, I should like to have my meals here. There are butchers in the city, people who sell fruits and fish. I don't see why there should be anything very extraordinary in my idea."

"Nothing could be easier. Simply get a cook. Only, a European cook will cost you a *talari* a day. The beys, the pashas, the hotel-keepers themselves find considerable difficulty in securing one."

"I want one who belongs to the country, who can prepare for me the food that everybody else eats."

"Very well, we shall be able to get one from M. Jean. He is a fellow-countryman of yours who keeps a tavern in the Coptic quarter, where servants out of employment are wont to gather."

## II

### MONSIEUR JEAN

M. Jean is a glorious relic of our army of Egypt. He was one of the thirty-three Frenchmen who took service among the Mamelukes after the retreat of the expedition. For several years he had, like the others, a palace, wives, horses and slaves. When that mighty

## MONSIEUR JEAN

army was destroyed, he, being a Frenchman, was spared, but back in civil life, his wealth disappeared in a very short time. He took it into his head to sell wine publicly, something then quite a novelty in Egypt, where the Christians and Jews got drunk only on brandy, arrack, and a kind of beer called *bouza*. Thenceforward, wines from Malta, Syria and the Archipelago entered into competition with these spirits, and the Mussulmans of Cairo did not seem to object to this innovation.

M. Jean applauded my determination to escape from hotel life. "But," said he, "you will find some difficulty in setting up a household for yourself. At Cairo, it is necessary to have as many servants as there are different kinds of work to be done. Each makes it a point of honour only to do one single thing, and they are all so lazy that one may reasonably doubt whether they will make a good job of that. Anything at all complicated either wearies them or goes undone, and generally, they leave you in the lurch as soon as they have earned enough to keep them for a few days in idleness."

"But how do the people of the country manage?"

"Oh, they let them go as they will, and engage two or three people for each task. In any case, an effendi always has his secretary (*khatibessir*), his treasurer (*khazindar*), his pipe bearer (*tchiboukji*), the *selikdar* to carry his weapons, the *seradjabchi* to hold his horse, the *kahwedji-bachi* to make coffee for him everywhere he stops, without counting the *yamaks* to wait upon the rest. When he is at home, he needs many more, for the porter would not consent to look after the rooms, and the cook would refuse to make coffee. He must even employ a special man to carry water. It is true that when one pays them a piastre and a half

## THE SLAVES

(twopence-halfpenny to three pence) a day, one is regarded by all these good-for-nothings as a highly magnificent patron."

"Well," said I, "even that is still a long way from the sixty piastres one has to pay every day in the hotels."

"But you will find yourself in a muddle that no European can get out of."

"I will try, I shall be learning something."

"They will give you horrible food."

"I shall be making the acquaintance of the dishes of the country."

"You will have to keep an account book, and fight about the price of everything."

"So I shall learn the language."

"Well, you can but try. I will send you the most honest, and you shall choose for yourself."

"Are they terrible thieves?"

"Swindlers (*carotteurs*) at the worst," said the old soldier, remembering a little of his military language. "Thieves! . . . the Egyptians! . . . They have not pluck enough."

Generally speaking, I find that Europeans have an undue contempt for the poor Egyptian people. The Cairo Frank, who now shares the privileges of the Turks, adopts their prejudices too. The people are poor, and doubtless ignorant, and they have so long been slaves that habit keeps them in a sort of abject condition. They are dreamers rather than men of action, intelligent rather than industrious; but I believe them to be good-hearted, and similar in character to the Hindus—a fact which is due perhaps to their almost exclusively vegetarian diet. We flesh eaters have considerable respect for the Tartar and the Bedouin, who are like ourselves; and are very inclined to make

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bad use of our energy when we are dealing with these herd-like masses.

When I had left M. Jean, I crossed the Esbekieh on my way to the Hotel Domergue. This square is a large open space between the outer wall of the city and the first houses of the Coptic and Frankish quarters. There are many palaces and splendid houses around it. Especially noticeable is the house where Kléber was assassinated, and that in which the sessions of the Institute of Egypt are held. A little wood of sycamores and "Pharaoh's fig-trees" reminds us of Bonaparte, who had them planted. At the time of the floods, the whole of the Esbekieh is covered with water, and dotted with *canges* and painted and gilded *djermes*, which belong to the owners of the neighbouring houses. This annual transformation of a public place into a pleasure lake does not prevent the planning of gardens or the digging of channels in ordinary times. There, I saw a great number of *fellahs* digging a trench. The men were using picks, and the women carried away heavy loads in rice-straw baskets. Among the women were several young girls, some in blue shifts, and those of less than eight years old perfectly naked, just as in the villages on the banks of the Nile. Overseers carrying sticks watched over the work, and occasionally struck those who seemed the less active. The whole work was carried on under the direction of a kind of soldier with a red cap on his head, high spurred boots, a cavalry sabre dangling at his side, and a whip of twisted hippotamus hide in his hand. This was bestowed upon the noble shoulders of the overseers, as they, in their turn, used their sticks upon the shoulder-blades of the *fellahs*.

The superintendent, seeing me stop and watch the poor girls bending beneath the sacks of earth, spoke to

## THE SLAVES

me in French. It was another fellow-countryman. I was not too much inclined to sentimentalize about the blows which the men received. In any case, they were not very severe, and in Africa people have not the same ideas as we have on this point.

"But why," said I, "should these women and children be made to work?"

"They are not compelled to do so," said the French superintendent, "but their fathers or their husbands prefer to have them working where they can see them rather than leave them in the city. They are paid from twenty paras to one piastre, according to their strength. One piastre (twopence halfpenny) is usually the wage of a day's work for a man."

"But why are some of them in chains? Are they convicts?"

"They are ne'er-do-wells; they would rather spend their time sleeping or listening to stories in the cafés than do any useful work."

"Then how do they live?"

"One can live on so little here! And if they need them, are there not always fruits and vegetables to be stolen from the fields? The government has great difficulty in getting the most necessary public works carried out, and when there is no other means, a quarter is surrounded, or a street blocked by troops, the passers-by are arrested, chained and brought to us, and there we are!"

"What! Everybody without exception?"

"Yes, everybody. When they have been arrested, they are given a chance to give an account of themselves. The Turks and the Franks declare themselves. As for the rest, those who have any money can buy themselves off; several refer to their masters or patrons. The remainder are brigaded and work either for a few



## MONSIEUR JEAN

weeks or a few months, according to the importance of the work which has to be done.

“What of it? Egypt in such matters is still in the Middle Ages. Formerly this forced labour used to be done for the advantage of the Mameluke beys. To-day the Pasha rules alone: the fall of the Mamelukes has suppressed individual serfdom, and that is all.”

### III

#### THE KHOWALS

After lunching at the hotel, I went to sit for a while in the finest café in the Mousky. There, for the first time, I saw dancing girls perform in public. I should like to give some description of the setting, but really there were neither trefoils, nor little columns, nor panels of porcelain, nor suspended ostrich eggs. It is only at Paris that one finds cafés so oriental as that. Instead, you must picture to yourself a modest square-shaped place, with whitewashed walls, whose only arabesque was a picture of a clock set in the middle of a field between two cypress-trees. This was repeated several times. The rest of the decoration consisted of mirrors also painted, which are supposed to reflect the brightness of a palm stem from which depend little bowls of oil with floating wicks. At night the effect is not too bad.

Hard wood divans, in prominent positions round the room, are furnished with palm baskets which act as stools for the smokers' feet. From time to time the dainty little cups of which I have already spoken are handed round. In this place, the fellah in his blue smock, the Copt with his black turban, or the Bedouin

## THE SLAVES

with his striped mantle, sit along the wall, and see, without either surprise or resentment, the Frank take his place beside them. The *cafedji* knows that he must put sugar in the cup for the Frank, and the company smiles at this queer mixture. There is a stove in one of the corners, and this is usually the principal ornament of the place. It is surmounted by a corner-piece of painted faïence, with festoons and scrolls and is not unlike the German stoves in appearance. There are always a number of little red copper coffee pots upon the hearth, for a fresh coffee pot must be used for each of the cups (*fines-janes*), which are the size of egg cups.

The dancing girls appeared in a cloud of dust and tobacco smoke. The first thing about them that struck me was the brightness of the golden caps upon their tresses. As their heels beat upon the ground, with a tinkle of little bells and anklets, their raised arms quivered in harmony; their hips shook with a voluptuous movement; their form seemed bare under the muslin between the little jacket and the low loose girdle, like the ceston of Venus. They twirled around so quickly that it was hard to distinguish the features of these seductive creatures, whose fingers shook little cymbals, as large as castanets, as they gestured boldly to the primitive strains of flute and tambourine. Two of them seemed particularly beautiful; they held themselves proudly: their Arab eyes were brightened by kohl, their full yet delicate cheeks were lightly painted. But the third, I must admit, betrayed the less gentle sex by a week-old beard; and when I looked into the matter carefully, and, the dance being ended, could better make out the features of the other two, it did not take me long to discover that the dancing girls were, in point of fact, all males.

## THE KHOWALS

Oh, this Oriental life, another of its surprises! and just when I was going to fall wildly in love with these mysterious creatures! I was ready to place upon their foreheads a few pieces of gold, in accordance with the purest traditions of the Levant. Lest you should think me prodigal, I hasten to add that there are pieces of gold called *ghazis*, worth from fivepence to five shillings. It is, of course, with the smallest that golden masks are made for the dancers, when, after a graceful performance, they come and bend their moist foreheads before each of the spectators. But for men dressed up as women this ceremony may well be dispensed with, and a few paras thrown to them instead.

Seriously, there is something very peculiar about Egyptian morality. A few years ago, the dancing girls used to go freely about the city, brightening the public festivals, and providing delight at the casinos and cafés. Now, they are only allowed to appear in private houses and banquets, and scrupulous people consider these dances by men with effeminate features and long hair, with bare arms, figures and necks, who parody so deplorably the half-veiled attractions of the dancing girls, more respectable.

I have used the word *almées* for these dancing girls, so as to make myself clear, though it is a European mistake. The dancing girls are called *ghawazies*; the *almées* are singing girls, and the plural of this word is pronounced *oualems*. The dancing boys, whom the morality of the Mussulmans permits, are called *khowals*.

When I left the café, I once more crossed the narrow street leading to the bazaar of the Franks, so as to reach the garden of Rosetta. I was surrounded by men selling cloths, who spread out before me the most gorgeous embroidered costumes, girdles of cloth of gold, weapons incrusting with silver, caps with a silken

## THE SLAVES

streamer in the Constantinople fashion, things so enticing as to excite in man a feeling of coquetry entirely feminine. If I could have looked at myself in the café mirrors, which existed, unfortunately, only in paintings, I should have been delighted to try on some of these costumes; certainly I do not intend to be long before I wear Oriental dress. But first, I must think about getting my establishment in order.

### IV

#### THE KHANOUH

Full of such reflections, I made my way home, having some time before sent back the dragoman so that he should await me there. At last, I no longer always lose myself in the streets. The house was full of people. First, there were the cooks whom M. Jean had sent. They were calmly smoking under the vestibule, where they had had coffee served. Then Youssef the Jew, on the first floor, was completely given over to the delights of the narghile. On the terrace there were still more people making a great noise. I awakened the dragoman, who was enjoying his siesta in a farther room. He cried, like a man in despair:

“It is just what I told you this morning!”

“What did you tell me?”

“That it was wrong of you to stay upon the terrace.”

“You told me that it was wiser only to go up at night so as not to make the neighbours uneasy.”

“Yes, and you stayed until after the sun was up.”

“Well?”

“Well! Now there are men whom the sheik sent an hour ago working up there at your expense.”

## THE KHANOUH

And indeed I found they were trellis-makers who were busy blocking out the view all one side of the terrace.

"On that side," said Abdullah, "is the garden of a *khanoum*, and she has complained that you have been looking over at her."

"But I never saw her . . . unfortunately."

"She saw you, and that is enough."

"How old is she, this lady?"

"Oh, she is a widow; she is quite fifty."

It seemed to me so ridiculous, that I pulled up and threw away the screens with which they were already beginning to surround the terrace. The surprised workmen withdrew without a word, for nobody at Cairo, except a Turk, would ever dream of resisting a Frank. The dragoman and the Jew shook their heads without expressing any opinion openly. I had the cooks brought up, and kept the one who seemed most intelligent. He was an Arab with black eyes, called Mustafa, and he seemed well satisfied with the piastre and a half a day which I promised him. One of the others offered to act as his assistant for only one piastre, but I did not consider it worth while to increase my household to such a degree.

I was beginning to talk to the Jew, who was explaining his ideas on the cultivation of mulberry-trees and the bringing up of silk-worms, when there was a knock at the door. It was the old sheik bringing back his workmen. He told me that I was compromising his position, and very badly requiting him for the kindness he had shown me in letting me the house. The *khanoum*, he said, was particularly vexed because I had thrown the screens into her garden, and she might very well go and complain to the *cadi*.

I envisaged a series of unpleasantnesses, and tried

## THE SLAVES

to excuse myself on the score of my ignorance of the customs, assuring him that I had seen nothing, and could have seen nothing, of what went on in the lady's house, being very shortsighted.

"You understand," said he, "how strong is the fear of any indiscreet eye penetrating the interior of gardens and courtyards, when blind men are always chosen to announce the prayer from the tops of the minarets."

"That I knew," I told him.

"It would be desirable," he added, "for your wife to pay a visit to the *khanoum*, and give her some present, a handkerchief, a trifle of some sort."

"But," said I, embarrassed, "up to the present I . . ."

"*Machallah!*" he cried, striking his forehead, "I forgot all about it! Oh, what an unfortunate thing it is to have *franguis* in this quarter. I gave you eight days to obey the law. If you were a Mussulman, you could not stay here. A man who has no wife can only live at the *okel* (inn or caravansery)."

I pacified him as best I could, and reminded him that I had still two days left. Really I wished to gain time to make sure that there was not some trick about the business, some scheme for getting out of me a sum over and above what I had already paid for my lodging. So, when the sheik had gone, I decided to go and see the French Consul.

## V

### MY VISIT TO THE FRENCH CONSUL

When I am travelling, I do without letters of recommendation as far as I can. The day one is known in a town, it becomes impossible to see anything

## MY VISIT TO THE FRENCH CONSUL

further. Our men of the world, even in the East, would never agree to show themselves except in certain recognised places, nor would they converse in public with people of a lower class, or go out for a walk at certain hours of the day in anything but full-dress. I am very sorry for these gentlemen, always properly attired, bridled and gloved, who dare not mingle with the common people to see some curious detail, a dance, or a ceremony; who would be afraid to be seen in a café or a tavern, to follow a woman, or even to make friends with an Arab who kindly offers you the mouth-piece of his long pipe, or has coffee brought to his door for you as soon as he sees you stay out of curiosity or fatigue. The English especially are perfect, and I can never see one pass without being thoroughly amused. Picture to yourself a gentleman mounted on a donkey, with long legs trailing almost on the ground. His round hat is adorned with a thick covering of white cotton piqué. This, we are told, is a device against the heat of the sun's rays, which are supposed to be absorbed by this head-dress which is half a mattress and half a hat. As a protection for his eyes, the gentleman has two pairs of goggles, framed in blue steel, to break up the reverberations of the sun upon the walls. Over all this, he wears a green woman's veil to keep off the dust. His indiarubber coat has an outer covering of waxed linen to safeguard him against the plague and the chance touch of the passer-by. In his gloved hands he holds a long stick to keep away any suspicious Arab, and, as a rule, he never goes out without having his groom on one side and his dragoman on the other.

There is not much risk of having to make the acquaintance of such caricatures, for the Englishman never speaks to anyone who has not been introduced to him, but we have a good number of fellow-countrymen who

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live in the English manner up to a certain point, and the moment one meets one of these estimable travellers, all is lost. Society takes possession of you.

Nevertheless, I finally decided to get from the bottom of my trunk a letter of recommendation for our Consul-General, who was, for the time being, living at Cairo. That same evening I dined at his house without there being any English or other "gentlemen" present. There was only Dr. Clot-Bey, whose house was next to the Consulate, and M. Lubbert, formerly director of the Opera, who is now *historiographer* to the Pasha of Egypt.

These two gentlemen, or, if you wish, these two effendis, for that is the title of everyone distinguished in science, literature, or civil office, wore Oriental dress becomingly. The sparkling *nichan* adorned their chests, and it would have been difficult to distinguish them from ordinary Mussulmans. The short hair, the beard and that slight tan which is quickly acquired in warm countries, very quickly transform a European into a very passable Turk.

I eagerly went through the French papers which were strewn upon the Consul's divan. Human weakness! To read newspapers in the country of papyrus and hieroglyphics! Not to be able to forget, like Madame de Staël on the shores of Lake Geneva, the brook of the Rue du Bac!

During dinner, the conversation turned upon a matter which was considered very serious: it was causing a great stir in Frankish society. A poor devil of a Frenchman, a servant, had decided to become a Mussulman, and the strangest part about it was that his wife also wished to embrace Islam. People were trying to find a way to prevent this scandal. The Frankish clergy had taken the matter very much to



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heart, and the Mussulman clergy regarded it as a point of honour to win the day. On the one hand, the faithless couple were offered money, a good situation and various advantages; on the other, the husband was told: "There is no point in your remaining a Christian; you will always remain what you are to-day. Nobody ever heard of a servant becoming a lord in Europe. With us, the meanest of varlets, a slave, a scullion may become an emir, a pasha, a minister. He may even marry the sultan's daughter. Age has nothing to do with it. The hope of attaining the highest rank leaves us only when we die." The poor devil, who perhaps had some ambition, was more and more attracted by such high hopes. And the future for his wife was no less brilliant; she would become a cadine at once, the equal of a great lady, with the right to look down upon any Christian or Jewish woman, to wear the black habbarah and yellow slippers; she might divorce her husband, and—more enticing still perhaps—marry a great personage, inherit, own land, a right forbidden to *yavours*, without counting the chances of becoming the favourite of a princess, or a sultana, governing the empire from the hidden depths of a seraglio.

Such was the double prospect which was held out to poor people, and it must be owned that this possibility which is open to people of low degree, of reaching, either by chance, or as a result of their natural intelligence, the highest positions without their past, their education, or their original condition being any obstacle, makes a reality of that principle of equality which, with us, is only to be found in law books. In the Orient, even the criminal, if he has paid his debt to the law, finds no career closed to him. Moral prejudice vanishes from before him.

Well, it must be admitted, in spite of all these en-

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ticements of the Turkish law, apostasies are very rare. The importance which was being attached to the affair of which I speak is a proof of it. The Consul thought of kidnapping the man and his wife during the night and having them put upon a French ship; but how were they to be taken from Cairo to Alexandria? It takes five days to go down the Nile. If they were put upon a closed boat, there was the risk that their cries might be heard on the way. In Turkish territory, change of religion is the only circumstance in which the power of the Consuls over their nationals ceases.

"But why should you kidnap these poor people?" I said to the Consul. "Would you have the right to do so from the standpoint of French law?"

"Certainly: in a seaport, I should not think twice about the matter."

"But suppose they are really acting from religious conviction?"

"Nonsense! Does anybody ever become a Turk?"

"There are a few Europeans who have taken the turban."

"Yes, men in high positions under the Pasha, who otherwise could not have reached the rank that has been conferred on them, or who could not have got the Mussulmans to obey them in any other manner."

"I like to think that, in the majority of cases, there was a genuine change; otherwise, I should see nothing more or less than interested motives."

"I agree with you; but let me explain why, in ordinary cases, we do all we possibly can to prevent a French subject from giving up his religion. With us, religion is distinct from the civil law; with the Mussulmans the two are merged in one. The man who embraces Mohammedanism becomes a Turkish subject in every respect, and loses his nationality. We have no

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further authority of any kind over him; he belongs to the staff and the sabre, and if he becomes a Christian again the Turkish law condemns him to death. When he becomes a Mussulman, he loses not only his faith but his name, his family and his country: he is no longer the man he was before; he is a Turk. You see it is a very serious matter."

However, the Consul offered us an excellent selection of wines from Greece and Cyprus, though I found it difficult to appreciate the different shades of flavour, because of a pronounced taste of tar, which, according to him, showed that they were genuine. It takes some time to become accustomed to this Hellenic refinement, though it is doubtless necessary to secure the keeping qualities of the genuine malmsey, the wine of the Commandery, or of Tenedos.

During the conversation, I found an opportunity to explain my domestic situation. I told the story of my fruitless attempts to marry, my modest adventures. "I have not the slightest intention of playing the Don Juan here," I said. "I have come to Cairo to work, to study the town and ransack its store of memories, and I find it is impossible to live on less than sixty piastres a day, and that, I admit, is more than I bargained for."

"You see," said the Consul, "in a town where strangers only come at certain times in the year, a town on the route to India, where lords and nabobs meet, the three or four hotels come to an arrangement to keep up prices and extinguish all competition."

"Doubtless. That is why I took a house for a few months."

"You did the wisest thing."

"Well, now they talk of throwing me out again, on the score that I have no wife."

## THE SLAVES

"They have the right to do so. M. Clot-Bey has mentioned the fact in his book. Mr. William Lane, the English Consul, also tells how he had to submit to the same necessity. Again, read Maillet's work—he was Consul-General under Louis XIV, and you will find that it was just the same in his time. You will have to take a wife."

"I have given up the idea. The last woman who was proposed has spoilt the rest for me, and, unfortunately, I was not a good enough match for her."

"That is a different matter."

"But slaves are much less expensive: my dragoman has recommended me to buy one and set her up in my house."

"That is a very good idea."

"Shall I be within the law then?"

"Absolutely."

The conversation continued. I was a little astonished at the ease with which Christians are permitted to acquire slaves in a Turkish land, and it was explained to me that the practice is confined to slaves of more or less colour, though Abyssinian women may be had who are almost white. The majority of the business men settled at Cairo have them, and M. Clot-Bey has trained many of them as midwives. I was given a further proof that the right was not contested, in that a black slave who had recently escaped from M. Lubbert's house had been brought back to him by the police.

I was still burdened with the preconceived ideas of a European, and I did not hear all this without some surprise. It is necessary to live for a while in the East to appreciate the fact that slavery there is only a form of adoption. The condition of a slave is certainly better than that of a *fellah* and a *rayah* who are

## MY VISIT TO THE FRENCH CONSUL

free. I already understood, since I had learned something about the system of marriage, that there is not a very great difference between an Egyptian girl sold by her parents and an Abyssinian exposed for sale in the bazaar.

There are differences of opinion among the Consuls in the Levant about the rights of Europeans over their slaves. The diplomatic code is not very clear upon the subject. Our Consul assured me that he sincerely hoped that the present position would not be altered, and for this reason. In Egypt, Europeans cannot be freeholders, yet with the help of legal fictions they do maintain estates and factories. Besides the difficulty they find in getting the natives to work, seeing that, as soon as they have earned the least sum, they go off to live in the sun until their money is exhausted, European traders often have the ill-will of the sheiks or other persons of weight to fight against. Such rivals in industry can deprive them of all their workers at once on the pretext of needing them for works of public utility. With slaves, at least they can get their work done regularly and continuously: that is, if the slaves are willing, for a discontented slave can always force his master to sell him again in the bazaar. It is this, among other things, that best explains the absence of hardship in the slavery of the Orient.

## VI

### THE DERVISHES

When I left the Consul's house, it was already very late; the *barbarin* was waiting for me at the door; Abdullah had sent him, thinking it his right to go to

## THE SLAVES

bed himself. There was nothing I could say: when one has so many servants, it is natural enough for them to share the work among them. Besides, Abdullah would not have allowed himself to be placed in the same category as the rest. In his own eyes, a dragoman is an educated man, a philologist who consents to put his knowledge at the service of the traveller; he is kind enough to fill the part of *cicerone*; if necessary, he will not even reject the attributes of Lord Pandarus of Troy, but beyond that he will not go. You have enough for your twenty *piastres* a day.

But he ought always to be there to explain to you anything you do not understand, and I should have been glad to know the meaning of a certain commotion in the streets which surprised me at that hour of the night. The *cafés* were open and full of people; the mosques, all lighted up, sent forth solemn music, and their towering minarets bore rings of light. There were tents on the *Esbekich*, and everywhere were to be heard the strains of drums and reed flutes. After we had left the *Esbekich* and set off down the streets, we found it hard to force our way through the crowd which pressed along by the shops which were open as though it were the middle of the day, each lit by hundreds of candles and decorated with festoons and garlands of gilded and coloured paper. In front of a little mosque in the middle of the street was an immense candelabra with a multitude of little pyramidal glass lamps and clusters of lanterns hanging round it. Thirty singers or more, seated in a circle round the candelabra, seemed to act as chorus in a chant of which four others who stood among them intoned the verses. There was a sweetness and a kind of loving expressiveness about this hymn, whose strains went up to heaven in the middle of the night, with that shade

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of melancholy with which Orientals invest their joys as well as their sorrows.

I stopped to listen, in spite of the urging of the *barbarin* who wished to draw me from the crowd. I noticed that the majority of the listeners appeared to be Copts, judging by their black turbans. It was clear that the Turks are quite prepared to allow the presence of Christians at this solemnity.

Very luckily, I remembered that M. Jean's shop was not far away from this street, and I succeeded in making the *barbarin* understand that I wished to be taken there. We found the old Mameluke well awake, and fully occupied selling his liquors. In an arbour at the end of the back court were a number of Copts and Greeks who had come for refreshment and to rest from time to time after the emotion caused by the festival.

M. Jean told me that I had just assisted at a musical ceremony, or *zîkr*, in honour of a dervish saint who was buried in the neighbouring mosque. This mosque being in the Coptic quarter, the wealthy members of that persuasion paid the expenses of the annual celebration, and this explained the mingling of black turbans with those of other colours. Besides, the Christians among the common people are glad to celebrate the feasts of certain dervishes, or *santons*, religious whose strange practices do not belong to any definite form of worship, and perhaps have their origin in the superstitions of antiquity.

When I returned to the place of the ceremony, to which M. Jean was good enough to accompany me, I found that the scene was even more extraordinary still. The thirty dervishes were holding each other by the hand and swaying backwards and forwards. Little by little, the four *corypheoi* or *zîkkers* seemed

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to enter into a poetic frenzy, half tender and half wild. Their hair, with its long curls, contrary to the Arab custom, waved in the air as their heads swayed, covered not with the tarboosh, but with a bonnet of ancient shape, like the Roman *petase*. Their humming chant occasionally took on a dramatic accent; the verses clearly answered one another, and the pantomime was addressed in a plaintive and tender manner to some unknown love object. Perhaps in this same way the ancient Egyptian priests celebrated the mysteries of Osiris, lost or recovered; such, doubtless, were the plaints of corybants or cabiri, and this strange choir of dervishes, howling and beating the ground in time, was perhaps still obeying that old tradition of ravishment and ecstasy which formerly was to be heard over all this Eastern country from the oasis of Ammon to cold Samothrace. Only to hear them, I felt my eyes fill with tears, and gradually all who stood by were in some measure enraptured.

M. Jean, an old sceptic of the Republican army, did not share this emotion; he thought it all very silly, and assured me that the Mussulmans themselves looked down upon the dervishes. "It is the common people who encourage them," he said. "Nothing is less in keeping with the genuine Mohammedanism, and indeed, so far as I can see, there is no meaning in what they sing." None the less, I asked him to explain it to me. "It is nothing at all," said he—"just love songs that they rattle out, nobody knows why. I know several of them. This is one they were singing:

" My heart is troubled by love;  
My eye-lids close no more !  
Will my eyes ever behold my loved one again ?



## THE DERVISHES

“In the exhaustion of these mournful nights, his  
absence kills my hope;  
My tears fall like pearls,  
And my heart is on fire !

“Tell me, oh dove, why dost thou so lament;  
Is it that absence afflicts thee too,  
Or do thy wings lack space to fly ?

“She answers: our griefs are alike;  
I am consumed by love;  
Alas ! it is that evil also,  
The absence of my lover that makes me grieve.”

The refrain with which the thirty dervishes accompany these couplets is always the same: “There is no God but God !”

“It seems to me,” I said, “that this song may well be addressed to the Divinity; there is no doubt that it is of divine love that the song treats.”

“Not at all. In other couplets you might hear them compare their well-beloved to the gazelle of Yemen, tell her that she has a clear skin, and has been but lately weaned. . . . They are,” he added, “what we should call lewd songs.”

I was not convinced. In the other verses he quoted to me I thought I perceived a certain resemblance to the Song of Songs. “You will see them play other fool tricks,” added M. Jean, “the day after to-morrow, on Mohammed’s feast day. Only I advise you to put on an Arab dress, for this year the festival coincides with the return of the pilgrims from Mecca, and among them there are many Moghrabins (Western Mussulmans) who do not care for the Frankish dress, especially since the conquest of Algiers.”

I promised to follow his advice, and, with the *barbarin*, went back to my house. The feast was to continue all through the night.

# THE SLAVES

## VII

### DOMESTIC TROUBLES

The following morning I summoned Abdullah to order my breakfast from the cook Mustafa. The cook replied that he must first secure the necessary utensils. That was perfectly reasonable, and I must say it was not a very complicated business. As for provisions, the fellah women take their stand all over the streets with cages full of poultry, pigeons and ducks; they even sell by the bushel chickens hatched in the incubators which are so famous in this country. Every morning the Bedouins bring capercailzie and quail, holding their claws tight between the fingers, like a crown all round the hand. All these things, without counting fish from the Nile, and the magnificent fruits and vegetables of this old land of Egypt, are sold at fabulously cheap prices.

Reckoning, for example, the fowls at twopence, and the pigeons at half as much, I might hope to escape the régime of the hotels for a long time. Unfortunately, one could not get fat birds; they were like little feathered skeletons. The fellahs find it more profitable to sell them like this than to fatten them up on maize. Abdullah advised me to buy a certain number of cages, so that I could fatten them myself. After that, the fowls were let loose in the courtyard and the pigeons in a room, and Mustafa, having discovered a little cockerel which was not quite so bony as the others, prepared, at my request, to make a couscoussou.

I shall never forget the sight of that fearsome Arab drawing his yataghan from his belt to murder the unhappy cock. 'The poor bird's appearance belied it,

## DOMESTIC TROUBLES

and there was very little beneath its plumage, though that was as gorgeous as a golden pheasant's. When it felt the knife, it uttered screams that tore my heart-strings. Mustafa cut off its head, and then let it drag itself along the terrace, still fluttering, till it stopped, stretched out its legs, and fell in a corner. These bloody details were quite enough to take my appetite away. I am very fond of cooking which I do not see done, and I regarded myself as infinitely more to blame for the death of the cockerel than if it had perished at the hands of an innkeeper. You will consider this a cowardly argument, but I could not get out of my head certain memories of classical Egypt, and at certain moments I would have scrupled to plunge my knife into the body of a vegetable for fear of offending some ancient god.

I do not wish to make more of the pity which may be occasioned by the slaughter of a skinny cockerel than of the interest which, quite legitimately, inspires a man who is compelled to feed upon it; there are many other provisions in the great city of Cairo, and fresh dates and bananas will always suffice for an excellent breakfast, but it did not take me long to appreciate the justice of M. Jean's remarks. The butchers in the city only sell mutton, and those of the suburbs have also camel's flesh by way of variety, and enormous quarters of this meat hang at the ends of the shops. There was never any doubt about the identity of the camel; but when it was a question of mutton, my dragoman's least objectionable joke was to suggest that it was dog. I swear I would never have allowed myself to be taken in. But I was never able to understand the system of weighing and preparation that brought the cost of every dish up to about ten piastres. I had to include, it is true, the necessary seasoning of *meloukia*

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or *bamie*, tasty vegetables, one of which practically takes the place of our spinach, while the other is entirely different from anything we have in Europe.

But, returning to more general principles, I came to the conclusion that in the Orient the innkeepers, dragomans, servants and cooks conspire at every point against the traveller. I realised that, failing a great stock of courage and even imagination, one needed an enormous fortune even for a short stay. M. de Chateaubriand declares that he ruined himself there; M. de Lamartine spent wild sums. As for other travellers, most of them never left the ports, or else scampered through the country as fast as they could. I determined to try what I thought would be a better plan. I would buy a slave, since I must have a woman of some sort, and by degrees I should succeed in making her take the place of the dragoman, and perhaps the *barbarin*, and have a clear reckoning with the cook. When I calculated the expenses of a long stay at Cairo, and that which I might make in other towns, it was obvious that I should be saving money. If I had married, I should have done the opposite. So I made up my mind and told Abdullah to take me to the slave bazaar.

## VIII

### THE OKEL OF THE JELLAB

We went right through the town until we came to the great bazaar quarter, and there, after going down a dark lane which turned at right angles from the main street, we entered an irregularly shaped courtyard without dismounting from our donkeys. In the middle

## THE OKEL OF THE JELLAB

was a well, shaded by a sycamore. On our right, along the wall, a dozen black men were standing. They seemed uneasy rather than unhappy, and most of them were dressed in the blue smock of the poorer classes. They were of all possible shades of colour and form. We turned to the left, and there, came to a row of little rooms, the floors of which were continued like a platform into the courtyard for about two feet. Several dark-hued merchants had already surrounded us, crying, "*Essouad? Abesch?*" (Blacks or Abyssinians?). We went on towards the first of the rooms.

There, five or six negresses, sitting on mats in a circle, were smoking, most of them at least, and welcomed us with shouts of laughter. They were dressed in very little more than blue tatters, and it would have been impossible to accuse the merchants of putting too much trimming upon their merchandise. Their hair, parted in hundreds of little closely twisted tresses, was usually held up by a red ribbon which divided the tresses into two great masses, with the parting dyed a bright red. On their arms and legs they wore pewter rings; they had collars of glass around their necks, and some copper rings through the ears or nose, thus completing a form of savage decoration, which was still further enhanced by the tattooing and colouring of the skin. These were negresses from Sennaar, and as a type of beauty, certainly very unlike that which suits our taste. Prominent jaws, low foreheads, and thick lips, put these poor creatures into a class almost like that of the beasts, though apart from this strange mask with which nature has endowed them, their bodies are wonderfully perfect; their figures virginal and pure beneath their tunics, while voices sweet and vibrant issue from mouths that breathe forth freshness.

I shall not fall in love with any of these pretty

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monsters, though doubtless the ladies of Cairo are glad enough to surround themselves with such chamber-maids, and so to ensure a delightful contrast in colour and form. These Nubian women are not ugly in the absolute sense, but their beauty is of a type quite contrary to any that we can appreciate. A white woman must stand out admirably amid these daughters of the night, whose slender forms seem designed to dress the hair, spread out garments, and carry flagons and vases, as we see them in the frescoes of antiquity.

If I were in a position to live the life of the East on the grand scale, I should not deprive myself of some of these picturesque creatures, but, as I only wished to buy a single slave, I asked to see others, in whom the facial angle should be more open, and the black hue less pronounced. "That depends upon the price you are prepared to pay," said Abdullah. "Those you see here only cost two purses (ten pounds); they are guaranteed for eight days, and you can send them back at the end of that time if there is any defect or weakness about them."

"I will gladly pay a little more," said I: "a woman with some good looks costs no more to feed than one of the other kind."

Abdullah did not appear to agree with me.

We went on to the other rooms; there were more of the daughters of Sennaar. Some were younger and more beautiful, but the same facial type predominated with a strange uniformity.

The merchants offered to have them undressed, opened their mouths to show their teeth, made them walk up and down, and were particularly careful to show off the elasticity of their breasts. The poor girls did all they were told without seeming much put out; indeed, most of them seemed to be laughing all the

## THE OKEL OF THE JELLAB

time, which made the whole business less painful. It was easy to understand that any kind of life would seem to them less objectionable than staying at the okel, and possibly than their previous existence in their own country.

Seeing none but pure-blooded negresses, I asked the dragoman if there were no Abyssinians there. "Oh," said he, "they are not shown in public. You must go into the house, and the merchant will have to be assured that you have not come, as the majority of travellers do, out of pure curiosity. Besides, they are much more expensive, and perhaps you will find a woman who will suit you among the slaves from Dongola. And there are other okels besides this. In addition to the Jellab okel, where we are now, there are the Kouchouk okel and the Ghafar khan."

A merchant approached us and told me that some Ethiopian women had just come, and that they had been left outside the city so as not to have to pay the taxes for entry. They were in the country outside the Bab-el-Madbah gate. I decided to see them first.

We set off through a somewhat deserted quarter and, after many turnings, came out into the plain, that is to say, among the tombs, for they surround the whole of this side of the city. We left the monuments of the caliphs on our left, and passed between dusty hillocks covered with mills, and formed out of the remains of ancient buildings. We stopped our donkeys at the gate of a walled place, which probably marked the site of a ruined mosque. Two or three Arabs, dressed in a costume unlike that of Cairo, received us, and I found myself amid a kind of tribe whose tents had been set up in this enclosure, walled in, as it was, on all sides. Just as at the okel, I was welcomed by the laughter of

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a number of negresses. These simple-minded folk express all their emotions quite openly, and there must be something about European clothes which excites their sense of the ridiculous. All these girls were busied about some household duty, and in the middle of them was a very tall and beautiful one who was watching the contents of a huge cauldron over the fire. Since nothing seemed to divert her from this occupation, I had the others shown to me. They hastened to leave their work, and themselves showed off their charms. Not one of the least of these was a head of hair all in plaits, such as I had seen before, but here completely soaked in butter, which dripped down over their shoulders and chests. I imagined it must be to prevent the sun from striking so powerfully upon their heads, but Abdullah assured me that it was a matter of fashion, intended to make their hair shine and their faces glisten. "Only," said he, "as soon as anyone buys them, he quickly packs them off to the bath, and has that plaited hair undone. It is only the fashion in the Mountains of the Moon."

The examination did not last long. The savage ways of these poor creatures were doubtless very interesting, but from the point of view of one who wished to live with them they were not very attractive. Most of them were disfigured by tattoo marks, grotesque incisions, blue stars and suns, cut in the somewhat greyish black of their skins. When one looks upon these wretched creatures, who must indeed be recognised as human, one must reproach oneself for having been sometimes lacking in consideration for the monkey, that poor relation whom our pride of race insists that we should not recognise. Their gestures and their attitudes increased the resemblance, and I even noticed that their feet, elongated and developed



## THE OKEL OF THE JELLAB

doubtless by their tree-climbing habits, were obviously similar to those of the family of quadrumanes.

They cried: *Backsheesh! Backsheesh!* and, hesitatingly, I drew a few piastres from my pocket, fearing lest their masters should be the only ones to benefit, but they, to reassure me, themselves proceeded to give the girls dates, water melons, tobacco and even brandy. Then there were transports of delight, and several of them began to dance to the strains of the tarabouk and zommarah, the mournful drum and fife of the African peoples.

The tall girl who was in charge of the cooking hardly troubled to turn round, but went on stirring the thick doura soup in the cauldron. I approached her, but she looked at me disdainfully, and the only thing about me which seemed to attract her attention was my black gloves. Then she folded her arms and uttered cries of admiration. How could I have black hands and a white face? It was beyond her comprehension. I increased her surprise by taking off one of my gloves, and then she began to cry: "*Bismillah! enté effrit? enté Sheytan?*—God preserve me! Are you a spirit? Are you the devil?"

The others showed signs of no less astonishment, and you may well imagine how extraordinary all the details of my appearance seemed to these simple souls. It was quite clear that in their country I could have earned my living simply by exhibiting myself. As for the chief of these Nubian beauties, it was not long before she resumed her original occupation, with the same inconstancy that monkeys show, whom everything distracts, but whose attention can never be held for more than a moment.

I amused myself by asking what she would cost, but the dragoman told me that she was the favourite of the

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slave merchant himself, and either he would not sell her because she might make him a father . . . or she would cost more.

I did not insist.

"There is no doubt about it," I said to the dragoman, "I find all these too dark. Let us try another shade. Are the Abyssinians so scarce upon the market?"

"For the moment," said Abdullah, "there is not a great supply, but the great caravan from Mecca is now due to arrive. It halted at Birket-el-Hadji, and will enter the city to-morrow at dawn. Then we shall have plenty of choice, for many of the pilgrims, being short of money to finish their journey, get rid of one or other of their women, and also there are always merchants who bring some back from the Hedjaz."

We left this okel without anybody seeming the least surprised that we had bought nothing. During my visit, however, some inhabitant of Cairo had made a deal and was going back along the Bab-el-Madbah road with a very fine pair of young negresses. They walked before him, dreaming of what the future had in store for them, wondering doubtless whether they would become favourites or slaves, and it was butter and not tears that glistened upon bosoms which were bared to the rays of the burning sun.

## IX

### THE CAIRO THEATRE

We went back along the Hazanieh street, and so came to another street which separates the quarter of the Franks from that of the Jews and follows the course of the Calish. It is crossed occasionally by

## THE CAIRO THEATRE

Venetian bridges with a single arch. In it there is a very fine café, the back of which looks out over the canal, and there sherbets and lemonade are to be had. Certainly there is no shortage of such refreshments at Cairo, for everywhere delightful shops offer the passer-by cups of lemonade and drinks with sugared fruits at prices well within the reach of all. As we turned out of the Turkish street to go down to the Mousky, I saw on the walls lithographed bills which announced that a play was to be given that same evening at the Cairo theatre. I was not sorry to be thus reminded of one of the joys of civilisation, dismissed Abdullah, and went to dine at Domergue's, where I was told that local amateurs were giving a play for the benefit of the poor blind who are, unfortunately, only too numerous at Cairo. The Italian season was due to open shortly, but this evening's entertainment was to be of the lighter variety.

As seven o'clock drew near, the narrow street, into which the passage of the Waghorn hotel opens, was crowded with people, and the Arabs were greatly astonished to see so many guests entering one house. It was a great occasion for the beggars and donkeymen, who, on all sides, cried "Backsheesh" at the top of their voices. The entrance, which is very dark, is in a covered passage which leads to the garden of Rosetta, and the interior is very similar to that of one of the smaller of our popular theatres. The stalls were filled with Italians and Greeks in red caps, making a tremendous noise. At the front were some of the Pasha's officers, and there were a good number of women in the boxes, most of whom wore Levantine dress.

The Greek women might be recognised by the *tatikos* of red cloth with gold ornaments, which they wear tilted over one ear; the Armenians by the shawls and

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veils which they put together and make into huge head-dresses. Since married Jewesses may not, according to the Rabbinical precepts, allow their hair to be seen, they wear curled cocks' feathers which come down over their temples and look like tufts of hair. It is only by such differences in head-dress that the different races can be distinguished. The other parts of their costume are practically identical. They wear the Turkish jacket crossed over their breast, the divided robe clinging to their hips, the girdle and the trousers (*cheytian*) which make every woman who is not wearing her veil look like a young boy. The arms are always covered, but from the elbow hang the sleeves of the different undercoats, whose masses of buttons the Arab poets compare to the flowers of the camomile. Add to this diamond aigrettes, flowers and butterflies, enhancing the splendour of most gorgeous dresses, and you will realise that the humble *Teatro del Cairo* is indebted to these Levantine costumes for a certain degree of magnificence. After all the black faces I had seen during the day, I was delighted to rest my eyes upon beauties which were no more than yellowish. Had I been less well disposed, I might have found fault with their eyes for having made too free with dye, their cheeks for being still too fond of the paint and patches of a bygone age, their hands for assuming, with an effect that was by no means pleasing, the orange hue of *henné*; but, in any case, I could not help giving my unstinted admiration to so many different types of beauty, the variety of the materials, and the splendour of the diamonds, of which the women of this country are so proud, that they carry all their husbands' fortunes upon their bodies. In fact, that evening, I enjoyed some slight relaxation from an abstinence from fresh faces which was beginning to

## THE CAIRO THEATRE

become irksome. Moreover, not a woman was veiled, for not a single true Mussulman woman was present at the play. The curtain went up, and I recognised the first scenes of *La Mansarde des Artistes*.

The principal parts were played by some young people from Marseilles, and the leading lady was Madame Bonhomme, the mistress of the French reading-room. I was surprised and delighted to gaze upon a perfectly fair, white skin; for two days I had been dreaming of the clouds of my country and the pale beauties of the north. This was doubtless due to the beginning of the *khamsin*, and to the fact that I had seen too many negresses, who certainly are far removed from my ideal.

When they left the theatre, all these beautifully dressed women put on the uniform *habbarah* of black silk, covered their features with white *borghots*, and got on their donkeys again like good Mussulmans, by the light of torches held by their grooms.

## X

### THE BARBER'S SHOP

The next day, in view of the feast which was being prepared to celebrate the arrival of the pilgrims, I decided to wear the costume of the country, so that I could look on more at my ease.

I already possessed the most important portion of the Arab dress, the *machlah*, a patriarchal cloak, which may be carried on the shoulders, or draped about the head and still cover the whole of the body. But then one has one's legs uncovered, while the head is covered like a sphinx—an effect which does not lack character.

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For the time being, I contented myself with going to the quarter of the Franks, where I proposed to effect a complete transformation, on the advice of the painter at the Hotel Domergue.

The alley which leads to the hotel later crosses the principal street of the Frankish quarter, and winds about until it finally loses itself in the long vaulted passages of the Jewish quarter. In this capricious street, sometimes narrow, with the shops of Armenians and Greeks on either side, and sometimes wider, with long walls and high houses, the commercial aristocracy of the Frankish nation resides: here we find the bankers, the brokers and the middlemen who deal in the produce of Egypt and the Indies. On the left, in the broadest part, a huge building which has nothing outside to indicate its nature, is at once the principal Catholic church and a Dominican monastery. The monastery consists of a number of little cells which open upon a long gallery; the church is a large hall on the first floor, with marble columns in the Italian style, not without a certain degree of taste. The women sit apart in tribunes with grills, and do not remove their black mantillas cut in the Turkish or the Maltese fashion. But we did not stop at the church, seeing that in order to take part in a Mohammedan festival we wished to avoid even the outward appearance of Christians. The painter took me onward, to a place where the street becomes narrower and more gloomy, until we came to a barber's shop, which is truly a miracle of ornament. It is one of the last of the monuments of the old Arabic type, which everywhere is giving way, both in decoration and architecture, to the Turkish style of Constantinople, a cold and unattractive mixture of Tartar and European.

In this delightful place, whose exquisitely carved

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windows look out over the Calish, I lost my European hair. The barber ran his razor over my head with great skill, and at my express request left one single lock at the crown like those which the Chinese and Mussulmans wear. Opinions vary with regard to the origin of this custom: some suggest that it is to offer a grip to the hands of the angel of death; others fancy that it had a more practical origin. The Turk never forgets the possibility that one day he may have his head cut off, and as it is the custom to show the head to the populace, he does not desire it to be lifted by the nose or the mouth, for that would be a terrible disgrace. Turkish barbers are unkind enough to make a clean sweep when they are shaving Christians, and I am sceptic enough to be a prey to every superstition.

His task accomplished, the barber had a pewter bowl held beneath my chin, and soon I felt a stream of water fall over my neck and ears. He had climbed upon a bench beside me, and was emptying a large earthen kettle of cold water into a leather vessel below my forehead. After that shock I had still to suffer a thorough shampoo with soapy water, and then my beard was dressed according to the latest Stamboul fashion.

Then a suitable head-dress had to be found. This was not difficult, for the street was full of tarboosh merchants and the fellah women who make the little white caps called *takiès*, which are placed immediately over the skin. Some of these are very daintily embroidered in open-work of thread or silk; some even have a lace edging made to come down below the red cap. They are usually made in France; and Tours, I believe, has the privilege of providing head-gear for the whole of the East.

With my two caps one upon the other, my neck bare,

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and my beard trimmed, I could hardly recognise myself in the tortoiseshell mirror which the barber presented to me. I completed the transformation by buying a huge pair of blue cotton trousers, and a decent red jacket with silver trimmings, whereupon the painter was kind enough to say that I might pass for a Syrian mountaineer from Saida or from Taraboulos. The assistants accorded me the title of *tchéléby*, which is the name given to the dandies of the country.

## XI

### THE CARAVAN FROM MECCA

I finally left the barber's, transfigured, delighted, glorying in the fact that I should no longer desecrate a beautiful city by appearing in it in a frock-coat and a round hat. Hats like ours seem so ridiculous to Orientals that in their schools they always keep a Frankish hat to put on the heads of ignorant or naughty children. It is the "fool's cap" of the Turkish schoolboy.

I was now ready to go and see the entry of the pilgrims, which had, indeed, begun at daybreak, but was to last all day. It is a matter of no small importance when thirty thousand people suddenly come to swell the population of Cairo, and the streets of the Mussulman quarters were crowded. We succeeded in reaching Bab-el-Fotouh, or the Gate of Victory. The long street which leads to it was completely filled with spectators whom the soldiers were keeping in place. The procession went along to the sound of trumpets, cymbals and drums, and the different peoples and sects were indicated by trophies and flags. I



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could not get out of my head the memory of an old opera very famous in the days of the Empire; I kept humming the "March of the Camels," and always expected to see Saint-Phar appear. Long files of dromedaries, tied one behind the other, ridden by Bedouins with long muskets, succeeded one another somewhat monotonously. It was only when we reached the country that we were able to appreciate, as a whole, a spectacle which is unique in the world.

It seemed like a nation on the march, a nation which had just formed itself into an enormous host, filling, on the right, the neighbouring hills of Mokatam, and, on the left, the thousands of usually deserted buildings in the City of the Dead. The battlements on the walls and towers of Saladin, with their striped bands of yellow and red, also swarmed with spectators. There was no longer any reason to think either of the opera or of the famous caravan which Bonaparte came to receive and feast at that same Gate of Victory. It seemed to me that the centuries went back still further, and that I was present at some scene of the time of the Crusades. Squadrons of the Viceroy's guards, with their glittering breastplates and their knightly helms, completed the illusion. Further on still, in the plain through which the Calish meanders, were thousands of motley tents, where the pilgrims stayed to refresh themselves a while. There were singers and dancers also at the feast, and all the musicians of Cairo seemed to be there trying to see whether they could not make as much noise as the trumpeters and drummers of the procession, a monstrous orchestra perched upon camel-back.

Nothing more bristling, bearded and ferocious than this immense cohort of Moghrabians could possibly be imagined. It was made up of people from Tunis,

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Tripoli and Morocco, with our own "compatriots" from Algiers. The entry of the Cossacks into Paris in 1814 would only afford a very poor parallel. And among them was a multitude of confraternities of santons and dervishes, screaming all the time their love songs and the name of Allah. Banners of a thousand colours; long staves bearing emblems and coats-of-arms; emirs and sheiks in gorgeous robes, on richly decked horses, glittering with gold and precious stones, gave this somewhat irregular procession splendour as great as the mind can conceive. One very picturesque feature was provided by the palanquins for the women, odd contrivances, which consisted of a bed, with a tent over it, set sideways upon a camel's back. Whole families with children and furniture appeared to be comfortably established in these pavilions, and most of the palanquins were hung with brightly coloured curtains.

When the day was nearly two-thirds done, the noise of cannon in the citadel, shouts and trumpets announced that the *Mabmil*, a kind of sacred ark in which is preserved Mohammed's robe of cloth of gold, had arrived within sight of the city. The most distinguished section of the caravan, the most magnificent horsemen, the most devout among the clergy, the aristocracy of the turban, denoted by their wearing green, surrounded this palladium of Islam. In single file came seven or eight dromedaries, with their heads so resplendent in trappings and harness that, beneath this adornment which almost hid them, they might have been salamanders or dragons worthy to be the steeds of fairies. Upon the first rode young drummer boys with bare arms, who raised and dropped their golden drumsticks amid a cloud of waving flags arranged about their saddles. Then came a symbolic old man with

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long white beard, crowned with a wreath of foliage, and seated in a kind of golden car, on camel-back like the rest; then the *Mahmil*, a splendid pavilion shaped like a square tent, with embroidered inscriptions all over it. Enormous silver balls surmounted it, and adorned each of the four corners.

From time to time, the *Mahmil* stopped, and the host of the faithful cast themselves upon the dust before it, bending their foreheads low upon their hands. An escort of cavasses seemed to find great difficulty in keeping back the negroes, who, more fanatical than the other Mussulmans, appeared to be doing their best to get the camels to trample upon them. Some degree of martyrdom, at least, they attained from the generous portion of blows showered upon them. Then among the santons, a type of holy man still more wildly devout even than the dervishes, though their orthodoxy is not so readily admitted, several were piercing their cheeks with long sharp daggers, so that they went their way covered with blood, while others swallowed living serpents, and others again filled their mouths with burning coals. The women took no part in these practices, and the only ones who made themselves remarked among the crowd of pilgrims were bands of *almées* belonging to the caravan, who sang in unison long guttural complaints, not hesitating to display unveiled faces tattooed in red and blue, and noses transfixed by heavy rings.

The painter and I mingled with the varied host which followed the *Mahmil*, crying "Allah !" as everybody else did, whenever the sacred camels halted. The camels seemed to be bestowing blessings on the crowd as they swung their gaily decorated heads and their long necks majestically from side to side, lowing strangely. As they entered the city there were

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more salvoes of cannon, and the procession made its way through the streets to the citadel, as the caravan poured its thirty thousand faithful into Cairo. Henceforth they would have the right to assume the title *badji*.

It was not long before we reached the great bazaars and the vast street called Salahieh, where the mosques of El-Hazar, El-Moyed and the Moristan display their wondrous architecture, and push upwards towards the skies sheaves of minarets and cupolas. And each time the procession passed before a mosque it grew smaller; some of the pilgrims left it, and slippers were piled up mountains high outside the doors, for none entered, except barefoot. The *Mahmil* did not stop: it went on through the narrow streets which climb up to the citadel, and there entered by the northern gate, passing between the assembled troops, amid the acclamations of the people gathered in the Roumelieh Square. Since I could not get inside the palace of Mehemet Ali, a new palace, built in the Turkish style, and not particularly impressive, I went to the terrace from which one may look out over the whole of Cairo. It is impossible to give more than the feeblest idea of the impressiveness of the view, which is one of the finest in the world. In the near foreground the eye is held by the vast extent of the mosque of the Sultan Hassan, striped and speckled with red, and still bearing the traces of the grapeshot fired by the French at the time of the famous revolt of Cairo. The town before you fills the whole horizon so far as the shady slopes of Choubrah. On the right is the long city of Mussulman tombs, the country around Heliopolis, and the vast plain of the Arabian desert broken only by the Mokatam range; on the left, the Nile with its ruddy waters, and the scanty clumps of date-palms and

## THE CARAVAN FROM MECCA

sycamores upon its banks ; Boulaq, the port of Cairo, half a league away ; the Island of Roddah, green and flower-strewn, cultivated like an English garden, with the Nilometer at the end of it, facing the gay country-houses at Ghizeh ; further still, the pyramids, on the foothills of the Lybian range, and more towards the South, at Saccarah, other pyramids and catacombs, with the forest of palm-trees which covers the ruins of Memphis ; and on the opposite bank of the river, as one returns to the city, old Cairo, built by Amrou in the place of the ancient Babylon of Egypt, half-hidden by the arches of an immense aqueduct, at whose foot the Calish empties itself, after going along the plain from the tombs of Karafeh.

The picture that lay before me teemed with life ; people swarmed over the open spaces, and out upon the neighbouring countryside. But it was now already evening, and the sun had plunged beneath the sand of that long ravine in the desert of Ammon which the Arabs call the *Waterless Sea*. In the distance I could only distinguish the course of the Nile, on which thousands of little boats left in their wake tiny silvery threads just as they had done in the time of the Ptolemies. It is time to go down again, to look away from that silent antiquity whose eternal secrets are guarded by a Sphinx now vanished in the sands ; let us see whether the splendours and beliefs of Islam will be sufficient to re-people the double solitude of the desert and its tombs, or whether we must still bewail a poetic past which is on its way to oblivion. Is this Arab Middle Ages, three centuries after its time, ready to crumble in its turn, as Greece did, at the heedless feet of Pharaoh's monuments ?

Alas ! as I turned round, I perceived towering above me the last red columns of the old palace of Saladin.

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Upon the remains of that glorious example of boldness and grace in architecture, with the delicate slightness of a building raised by genii, there had recently been set up a square building, all marble and alabaster, without a trace of elegance or character, which looked like a corn market, though it was destined to be a mosque. It will, in fact, be as much a mosque as the Madeleine is a church: modern architects always take care to provide God with a habitation which can be made to serve some other purpose when people cease to believe in him.

The authorities appeared to have celebrated the arrival of the *Mahmil* to everybody's satisfaction. The Pasha and his household had respectfully received the robe of the Prophet on its return from Mecca, the holy water from the well of Zemzem, and the other ingredients of the pilgrimage. The robe had been displayed to the populace at the gate of a little mosque behind the palace, and already the illumination of the city produced a magnificent effect from the top of the walls. Far away in the distance, the tall buildings by their illuminations brought to life again the details of their architecture which had been lost in the darkness. Chaplets of light girt the domes of the mosques, and once more the minarets were dressed in those bands of light which I had seen before. On the fronts of the buildings blazed verses from the Koran in coloured glass. After admiring this wonderful sight, I hurried to the Esbekieh where the most splendid part of the festival was proceeding.

The shops in the quarters near here blazed with light: pastry cooks, fruit-sellers and other merchants had taken possession of all the space on the ground level; confectioners displayed marvels of sugar work in the form of buildings, animals and other fancies. Pyra-

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mids and chandeliers of lights made everything seem as bright as day, and upon cords stretched at regular intervals there ran little illuminated ships, a memory perhaps of the Isiac festivals, preserved like so many others by the Egyptian people. The pilgrims, mostly dressed in white, darker of complexion than the people of Cairo, were everywhere received as brothers. It was at the south of the square, in that part of it nearest to the quarter of the Franks, that the principal celebrations were taking place. Tents had been set up, not only to serve as cafés, but for the *zîkr* or gatherings of pious singers, and there were tall beflagged masts with bunches of lights upon them for the dancing dervishes, who should not be confused with the howling dervishes, for they have each their own method of attaining that state of enthusiasm which brings them visions and ecstasies. Around these masts the dervishes whirled round and round, crying in a stifled voice *Allah Zhey!* which means "Living God!" The masts, of which there were four in a straight line, are called *sârys*. In other places the crowd gathered to watch jugglers and tight-rope dancers, or to listen to the rhapsodists (*schayërs*) who recite portions of the romance of Abu Zeyd. These stories go on night after night in the cafés of the city and, like the serials in our newspapers, are always broken off at the most thrilling point, so as to bring back to the same café next day those who are eager to hear new exciting incidents.

See-saws, games of skill, every kind of *caragheuz* in the form of marionettes or shadow-plays, added to the gaiety of this fair, which would last for two more days until Mohammed's birthday, which is called *El-Mouled-en-neby*.

The next day at dawn I set off with Abdullah for the slave bazaar in the Soukel-ezzi quarter. I had

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picked out a very handsome donkey striped like a zebra, and arranged my new costume with a certain measure of coquetry. Because one is going to buy a wife, there is no reason why one should start by frightening her. The scornful laughter of the negresses had taught me that lesson.

## XII

### ABD-EL-KERIM

We came to a very fine house which had doubtless once belonged to a *kachef*, or a Mameluke bey; its vestibule was continued as a colonnaded gallery over one of the sides of the courtyard. At the end there was a great wooden divan with cushions, and on this there sat a good-looking Mussulman, dressed with some distinction, who was nonchalantly threading a chaplet of aloes wood. A negro boy was relighting the charcoal in his narghile, and a Coptic scribe, seated at his feet, doubtless acted as his secretary.

"This," said Abdullah to me, "is the lord Abd-el-Kerim, the most famous of the slave merchants. He can, if he is so minded, find a very handsome woman for you, but he is rich and often keeps such women for himself."

Abd-el-Kerim nodded graciously to me, placed a hand upon his chest and said *saba-el-kher*. I replied with a similar Arabic formula, but with an accent which told him clearly enough whence I came. However, he invited me to take a seat beside him, and had a narghile and coffee brought.

"He sees that you are with me," said Abdullah, "and that gives him a good opinion of you. I am



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going to tell him that you propose to settle down here, and that you are inclined to establish your household in due style."

Abdullah's words seemed to make a favourable impression upon Abd-el-Kerim. He spoke a few polite words to me in bad Italian.

The fine, distinguished face, the keen eye and gracious manners of Abd-el-Kerim made it seem quite natural that he should do the honours of his palace, in spite of the unfortunate business he carried on there. In him there was a strange mixture of princely affability and the ruthless determination of a pirate. He seemed the sort of man who could subdue his slaves just by the fixed expression of his melancholy eye, and, even when he had made them suffer, leave them with some regret that he was no longer their master. It is quite clear, I said to myself, that any woman I buy in this place will have been in love with Abd-el-Kerim. Never mind; there was such a fascination about his gaze that I realised it was almost impossible not to do business with him.

In the square courtyard, where a number of Nubians and Abyssinians were strolling about, were many gateways and overhead galleries delightfully constructed; great *moucharabys* of turned woodwork overhung the entrance to a staircase with Moorish arcades, by which one went up to the apartments of the most beautiful slaves.

There were already a goodly number of would-be purchasers examining the negroes of various degrees of blackness who were gathered in the courtyard. They were made to walk backwards and forwards, tapped upon the back and chest, and made to show their tongues. One of these young fellows, dressed in a *machlah* of yellow and blue stripes, wearing his hair

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in plaits and set flat upon his head so that it looked like a head-dress of the Middle Ages, wore a heavy chain upon his arm which rattled with each proud step he took. He was an Abyssinian of the tribe of the Gallas, and had doubtless been captured in war.

Around the courtyard were several low rooms in which the negresses lived. For the most part they were, as I had seen them before, care-free and merry, ready to laugh at the least little thing; but there was one woman, cloaked in yellow, who wept as she hid her face against a pillar in the vestibule. The sad calmness of the sky, and the embroidery of light which the sunbeams traced as they cast long angles in the courtyard, seemed to protest in vain against the eloquence of despair. My own heart was touched.

I went behind the column, and although her face was hidden, I saw that the woman was almost white, and that a little child pressed close against her, half hidden by her mantle.

However hard one may try to accept the oriental philosophy of life, at such moments one feels that one is French and capable of feeling. For a moment I thought I would buy her if I could, and give her back her freedom.

“Do not trouble about her,” said Abdullah. “She is the favourite slave of an effendi. She has misbehaved herself in some way and he has sent her to the market, but they are only pretending that they mean to sell her and her child. When she has spent a few hours here, her master will come and take her back, and doubtless forgive her.”

So the one slave who was weeping there, was weeping because she thought she had lost her master; the rest only seemed to be afraid that they would have to wait some time before they found one. What more striking

## ABD-EL-KERIM

evidence could we have in favour of the Mussulman character? In Egypt no one except the fellah works upon the land. Compare the fate of the slave here with that of his fellow in America. Here the strength of the slave is spared, and he is given little but household work to do. He is expensive. But what an enormous difference there is between the position of a slave in a Turkish country and that of one in a Christian country.

### XIII

#### THE JAVANESE

Abd-el-Kerim had left us for a moment to attend to some Turkish buyers; now he came back and told me that the Abyssinians were being dressed, and that I should see them in a moment. "They live in my harem," he said, "and are treated exactly as members of my own household. My wives take their meals with them. Meanwhile, if you would care to see some very young ones, they shall be brought."

A door was opened, and in rushed a dozen copper-hued little girls like children playing. They were allowed to romp under the staircase with the ducks and guinea-fowl which swam about in the basin of a sculptured fountain, a remnant of the vanished splendour of the *okel*.

I looked at these poor girls, with their great, black eyes; they were dressed like little sultanas. They had doubtless been torn from their mothers' arms to satisfy the evil passions of the wealthier people of the town. Abdullah told me that several of them did not belong to the merchant, but were being sold for their parents who came specially to Cairo for the purpose,

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imagining that by so doing they were securing for their children the most desirable position in life.

"You should know," he added, "that they are more expensive than women of marriageable age."

"*Queste fanciulle sono cucite*," said Abd-el-Kerim, in his bad Italian.

"Oh, you may be perfectly satisfied, and buy with confidence," said Abdullah with the air of a connoisseur, "the parents have taken every precaution."

"Well," said I to myself, "I shall leave these children to others. The Mussulman, who lives according to a law of his own, can answer to God with a clear conscience for the fate of these poor little souls. If I buy a slave, it is with the intention that she shall be free—even to leave me."

Abd-el-Kerim came back and escorted me to the upper floors. Abdullah remained discreetly at the foot of the staircase.

In a great room with carved wainscoting, still adorned by the remains of painted and gilded arabesques, five women were standing against the wall. They were beautiful, with complexions that reminded me of the beauty of a Florentine bronze. Their features were regular, their noses straight, their mouths small. The perfect oval of their heads and the graceful setting of their necks, together with the serenity of their countenances, made them seem like painted Madonnas of Italy whose colour has been darkened by time. They were Catholic Abyssinians, descended perhaps from Prester John or Queen Candace.

It was difficult to make a choice: they were all so much alike: it is always so with these primitive races. Abd-el-Kerim, seeing me undecided, and thinking that they did not please me, had another one brought

## THE JAVANESE

in. With a slow, indolent step, she took her place against the wall.

I uttered a cry of delight: I had recognised the almond-shaped eyes, the slanting eyelids of the Javane, of whom I had seen paintings in Holland. From her colouring, this woman belonged clearly to the yellow race. Some desire for the strange and the unknown, against which I could not defend myself, decided me in her favour. Besides, she was very beautiful, and her body—which was displayed without any undue diffidence—was firm and strong. The brightness of her eyes, the whiteness of her teeth, the fineness of her hands, and the dark mahogany colour of her long hair, which I saw when her tarboosh was removed, allowed me no reason to object to the praises which Abd-el-Kerim expressed with his *Bono ! Bono !*

We went downstairs again, and talked the matter over with the assistance of Abdullah. The woman had arrived the night before with the caravan, and had only been with Abd-el-Kerim since then. She had been captured quite young in the Indian archipelago by the corsairs of the Imam of Muscat.

“But,” I said to Abdullah, “if Abd-el-Kerim put her amongst his women yesterday—”

“Well?” said the dragoman, opening astonished eyes.

I perceived that I had made a foolish remark.

“Do you imagine,” said Abdullah, when at last he saw what was in my mind, “that his lawful wives would allow him to pay court to others? And he a merchant too! Why just think! If it were known, he would lose all his customers.”

It was true enough. Besides, Abdullah swore to me that Abd-el-Kerim, as a good Mussulman, must have

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passed the night in prayer at the mosque, on the occasion of this solemn feast of Mohammed.

The only question that remained was one of price. I was asked five purses (25 pounds); I had only intended to offer four, but considering that a woman was the object of this bargaining, to insist would have seemed unworthy. Moreover, Abdullah assured me that a Turkish merchant never had two prices.

I asked her name, for, of course, I was buying her name too. "Z'n'b'," said Abd-el-Kerim. "Z'n'b'," repeated Abdullah with a great effort at nasal contraction. I could not make out how the sneezing of three consonants could represent a name, and it took me a long time to guess that they might be pronounced Zeynab.

After giving Abd-el-Kerim some money on account, we left him and went to my banker's in the Frankish quarter, to get the rest of the purchase money. As we crossed the Esbekieh we saw an extraordinary sight. A large crowd had gathered to see the ceremony of the *Dohza*. The sheik or emir of the caravan was to ride on horseback over the bodies of the whirling and howling dervishes, who had been performing ever since the night before, about their masts or in their tents. The unfortunate creatures were lying flat upon their bellies on the road to the house of the sheik El-Bekry, the chief of all the dervishes, at the southern end of the square, and their sixty bodies formed a human roadway.

This ceremony is regarded as a miracle destined to convert the infidel, and so Franks are gladly allowed to occupy the front places. Miracles have become rare, since, as Heine says, man has taken the precaution of looking up the sleeves of the Almighty, but there was no doubt about this, if miracle it was. With my own

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eyes I saw the old sheik of the dervishes, dressed in a white cloak with a yellow turban, ride over the loins of sixty of the faithful pressed so close together that there was not the slightest space between them, and with their arms crossed beneath their heads. The horse was shod with iron. Up they all rose in one straight line, singing the praises of Allah.

The sceptics of the Frankish quarter suggest that this phenomenon is of a nature similar to that which formerly enabled the convulsionists to bear blows with a poker upon their stomachs. The state of exaltation into which these people work themselves is said to produce a condition of nervous energy which suppresses feeling and pain, and communicates an extraordinary degree of resistance to the organs.

The Mussulmans will not admit this explanation. They say that the horse has been ridden over glasses and bottles without breaking anything.

I should have liked to see that.

Nothing less than something of that sort could have induced me to forget my purchase for a single moment. That very night, I conducted my slave, now veiled, in triumph to my house in the Coptic quarter. It was indeed time, for this was the last day that the sheik of the quarter had granted me. A servant from the okel followed her with a donkey carrying a large green chest.

Abd-el-Kerim had done things well. In the chest were two complete outfits. "They belong to her," he sent word to me; "they came to her from a sheik at Mecca, to whom she once belonged, and now they are yours."

It would be difficult to conceive a more delicate method of procedure.

## PART III

### THE HAREM

#### I

#### THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

I DID not regret my decision to stay some time at Cairo and become in every respect a citizen of that city, for there can be no doubt that to do so is the only way to understand and to love it. Usually, travellers do not give themselves sufficient time to comprehend its intimate life, and to appreciate thoroughly its picturesque beauties, its contrasts and its memories. Yet Cairo is the only city of the Orient where we may find perfectly distinct the successive layers of several historic ages. Neither Bagdad, nor Damascus, nor Constantinople has preserved such subjects for study and reflection. In the first two, the stranger finds nothing but fragile buildings of brick and dried earth; the interiors do indeed present some magnificent examples of decoration, but nothing that has been established in conditions essential in serious and lasting art. Constantinople, with its houses of painted wood, must be rebuilt every twenty years, and retains nothing beyond the dull uniform appearance of bluish domes and white minarets. But Cairo, thanks to its inexhaustible quarries at Mokatam and the invariable mildness of its climate, possesses numberless monuments. The periods of the caliphs, the soudans and the Mameluke sultans correspond to systems of architecture of



## THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

their own, of which Spain and Sicily have only in part the models and counterparts. The Moorish wonders of Granada and Cordova are recalled at every step the traveller takes in Cairo in the door of a mosque, a window, a minaret, an arabesque, of which the shape or the style gives us the exact date, however remote that date may be. The mosques alone could tell us the whole history of Mussulman Egypt, for every prince has built at least one, in his desire to pass on to posterity the remembrance of his time and of his glory. So the names of Amrou, Hakem, Tulun, Saladin, Bibars or Barbuk are kept ever fresh in the memory of this people, though the most ancient of these monuments have now no more to offer than crumbling walls and desert spaces.

The mosque of Amrou, the first to be built after the conquest of Egypt, occupies a position now lying waste between the old city and the new. There is nothing to defend against profanation this place that was once so deeply revered. I have passed through the forest of columns which still uphold the ancient roof; I have climbed into the carved pulpit of the iman, which was set up in the year 94 of the Hegira, of which it was said that there was none more beautiful or more noble after that of the Prophet; I have gone through the galleries and seen in the centre of the courtyard the place where the tent of Omar's lieutenant was set up when he decided to found old Cairo.

A dove had made its nest above the pavilion. Amrou, the conqueror of the Egypt of the Greeks, who had just sacked Alexandria, would not have the bird disturbed. It seemed to him that this place was consecrated by the will of Heaven, and he began by building a mosque around his tent, and then around the mosque a town, to which the name of *Fostat*, which means *tent*, was

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given. To-day, this place is no longer even in the town, and once more, as the chronicles depicted it, stands amid vines, gardens and groves of palm-trees.

No less abandoned, but at another side of Cairo and within the walls near Bab-el-Nasr, I came upon the mosque of the caliph Hakem, built three centuries later, which is bound up with the memory of one of the strangest heroes of the Mussulman Middle Ages. Hakem, whom our old Orientalists called *le Chacamberrille*, was not content to be the third of the African caliphs, the heir by conquest to the treasures of Harun-al-Rashid, the absolute master of Egypt and Syria; the craving for wealth and splendour made of him a sort of Nero, or rather Heliogabalus. Like the former, he set fire to his capital one day when the fancy took him; like the second, he proclaimed himself divine, and drew up the rules of a religion which was adopted by a section of his people, and has become that of the Druses. Hakem was the last revealer, or, if you will, the last god whom the world has produced, who still has believers more or less numerous. The singers and story-tellers of the Cairo cafés have a host of stories to tell about him, and on one of the peaks of Mokatam I was shown the observatory where he went to consult the stars, for even those who do not believe in his divinity regard him as at least a mighty magician.

His mosque is still more ruined than that of Amrou. The outer walls and two towers or minarets at the angles alone present recognisable forms; they are of the period which corresponds to the oldest monuments in Spain. To-day, the enclosure of the mosque, covered with dust and strewn with débris, is occupied by ropemakers who twine their hemp in this vast space, and whose monotonous wheel has replaced the humming sound of prayer. Is the building of the

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faithful Amrou any less abandoned than that of Hakem, the heretic, abhorred by all true Mussulmans? Egypt, as forgetful as she is credulous, has buried beneath her dust many other prophets and many other gods.

In this country the stranger has to fear neither the fanaticism of religion nor the racial intolerance of the other parts of the East. The Arab conquest has never been able to transform to such a degree the character of the inhabitants. Besides, is it not the ancient motherland whence Europe, through the Greek and Roman world, feels that its own origins are derived? Religion, morality, industry—all came from this centre at once so mysterious and yet so accessible, whence the great minds of the earliest days drew wisdom for us. They made their way in fear and trembling into these strange sanctuaries where the future of mankind was being worked out, and came forth again, their foreheads girt with divine light, to reveal to their own people traditions that came from before the Flood, and go back even to the earliest days of the world. So Orpheus, so Moses, so that lawmaker whom we do not know so well, whom the Indians call Rama, all brought away the same basis of teaching and belief, which was to be modified indeed according to place and race, but which everywhere formed the foundation of lasting civilisations. What gives its character to Egyptian antiquity is precisely this idea of universality and even of proselytism, which Rome imitated afterwards in the interests of her own power and her own glory. A people who founded indestructible monuments that it might carve upon them all the processes of art and industry; which spoke to posterity in a tongue which posterity is just beginning to understand, certainly merits the gratitude of all men.

# THE HAREM

## II

### LIFE AT THE TIME OF THE KHAM SIN

By study and reading, I have turned to my advantage the long days of inaction which the *khamsin* imposed upon me. From early morning, the air was stifling and filled with dust. For fifty days, each time the wind blows from the South, it is impossible to go out before three o'clock in the afternoon, at which time there comes a breeze from the sea.

People stay in the lower rooms walled with glazed tiles or marble, with fountains to freshen the air; they may pass their time in the baths, amid that tepid mist which fills a vast building, whose cupola, pierced with holes, looks like a starry sky. For the most part these baths are real monuments, which would do very well for mosques or churches. They are Byzantine in architecture, and were probably originally modelled upon the baths of the Greeks. Among the columns on which the roof rests are a number of little marble rooms, where delightful fountains provide for cold bathing. You may, as you will, mingle with the crowd or cut yourself off from it: it has nothing of that invalidish appearance which we find in our own gatherings of bathers, and is generally made up of healthy fine-looking men, draped in the ancient manner in a long piece of linen. Their forms are only vaguely to be seen through the milky fog which is transpierced by white sunbeams from the vaulted roof, and the observer might fancy himself in some paradise peopled by happy shades. But purgatory awaits you in the next rooms. There are basins of boiling water in which the bather must undergo various methods of being cooked; it is

## LIFE AT THE TIME OF THE KHAM SIN

here that those terrible bullies pounce upon you, their hands covered with hair gloves, and strip from your skin long molecular rolls whose thickness terrifies you, and you fear lest you should be gradually worn away like a vessel that is too much scoured. But you can, if you like, refrain from these ceremonies and be content with the general sense of well-being which comes from the damp atmosphere of the large bathing hall. Strangely enough, this artificial heat makes one less oppressed by the other kind; the terrestrial fire of Pta combats the over-keen ardour of the celestial Horus. Need I mention the delights of massage, and the exquisite rest one enjoys upon the beds placed around the lofty balustraded gallery above the entrance hall? Coffee, sherbet, narghile, interrupt or prepare for that light slumber in the afternoon which is so pleasant to the peoples of the Levant.

Then, too, the wind does not always blow from the South during the *kham sin*; it sometimes changes for whole weeks and literally allows us to breathe. Then the city again assumes its lively appearance, the crowd spreads over the squares and into the gardens; the Choubrah avenue is filled with strollers; veiled Mussulman women go and sit in the summer houses, on the edge of the fountains, or in the shady tombs, and there dream all day, surrounded by happy children, and even have their meals brought to them. There are two principal ways in which the women of the Orient can escape from the solitude of the harem. One is the cemetery, where there is always some loved one for them to weep, and the other is the public bath, to which custom obliges their husbands to send them at least once a week.

This fact, which I had not known, caused me considerable domestic trouble against which I must warn

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any European who may be tempted to follow my example. I had no sooner brought my Javanese slave home from the bazaar than I was assailed by a host of reflections which had never previously occurred to me. The fear of leaving her another day among Abdel-Kerim's women had precipitated my resolution, and, I must admit, the first glance had proved all-powerful.

There is something very attractive about a woman from a far and strange country, who speaks an unknown language, whose costume and habits are effective in their very strangeness, and who has none of those vulgarities of detail which habit reveals to us in the women of our own country. For some time I allowed this fascination of local colour to work upon me; I listened to her chatter; I watched her make the best of her strange garments. It was like keeping a bird in a cage, but could this impression last for ever?

I had been assured that if the merchant had deceived me about the merits of the slave; if she showed any sign of redhibitory vice, I could get out of my bargain within eight days. I hardly thought it possible for a European to take advantage of that unworthy clause, even if he had been deceived. But I was rather troubled to see that under the red band which went round her forehead, this poor girl had a burnt spot as large as a crown, just where her hair began. On her chest was another burn of the same shape, and over the two marks a tattooing which represented a kind of sun. There was a tattoo on her chin in the shape of a lance head, and her left nostril was pierced for a ring. Her hair was clipped at the front round the temples and, except for the burnt place, fell to her eyebrows which were made longer and joined, as the custom was, by a black line. Her arms and feet were dyed orange, but this I knew was the result of a preparation of

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henna which would leave no trace at the end of a few days.

What was I to do next? To dress a yellow woman in European clothes would have been the most foolish thing in the world. I contented myself by making signs to her that she must let the hair which had been cut grow again, which seemed to astonish her greatly. As for the burn on her forehead and on her chest, which was probably the result of some custom in her own country, for nothing of the sort is to be seen in Egypt, they could be hidden by some jewel or ornament. When all was said and done, I had not too much to grumble about.

### III

#### DOMESTIC DUTIES

The poor child had gone to sleep whilst I was examining her hair with that solicitude which every owner shows when he is anxiously trying to find out what there is amiss in something he has just acquired. I heard Ibrahim outside call *Ra sidi* (Hey, Sir!), and other words by which I understood that someone had come to call on me. I went out of the room, and on the gallery found the Jew Yousef anxious to talk to me. He saw that I did not wish him to go into the room, and we walked up and down as we smoked.

"I hear," said he, "that you have been persuaded to buy a slave, and I am very much annoyed."

"Why?"

"Because you have certainly been cheated or robbed; the dragomans always have an understanding with the slave merchant."

"That is quite likely."

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"Abdullah has received at least one purse for himself."

"What do you propose I should do about it?"

"That is not all. When you wish to go away, you will not know what to do with this woman, and he will offer to buy her back from you for a mere nothing. That's just what he is accustomed to do, and it is for that reason that he persuaded you not to get married in the Coptic manner, which would have been much simpler and less expensive."

"But you know quite well that I had scruples about entering upon a marriage which entails some sort of religious consecration."

"Well, why didn't you tell me so? I could have found you an Arab servant who would have got married for you as often as you liked."

The strangeness of this proposal made me burst out laughing; but when one is at Cairo, one quickly learns not to be astonished at anything. From what Yousef told me, I found that there are indeed people wretched enough to perform such services. The ease with which an Oriental can take a wife and divorce her when he feels like it makes such an arrangement possible, and it can only come to light when some woman lodges a complaint. Obviously it is only a means of evading the Pasha's strictness in the matter of public morals. Every woman who does not live alone or in her family must have a legally recognised husband, even if she divorces him at the end of a week, that is unless, being a slave, she has a master.

I explained to the Jew Yousef that any such arrangement would have utterly disgusted me.

"Oh," cried he, "what does it matter, with Arabs?"

"You might also say with Christians."



## DOMESTIC DUTIES

"It is a custom the English have introduced," he added; "they are so wealthy."

"Then it is expensive?"

"It used to be, but now there is competition; it is within everybody's reach."

So this is the sort of end to which come the moral reforms that are attempted here. A whole population is depraved in order to escape an evil which is certainly less. Ten years ago there were public bayaderes in Cairo as there are in India, and courtesans like those of antiquity. The ulemas objected, but, for a long time, without success, because the Government drew a reasonably large income from these women, who formed a definite corporation, and most of whom lived outside the city at Matarea. Finally, the pious people of Cairo offered to pay the tax in question, and then all these women were exiled to Esné in Upper Egypt. To-day, this town of the ancient Thebaïd seems like a kind of Capua to the strangers who go up the Nile. There are Lais and Aspasia's who live in the grand style and have grown rich, mostly at the expense of the English. They have palaces and slaves, and might have pyramids built for themselves as the famous Rhodope did, if it were still the fashion to pile stones upon one's body to show how glorious that body had been. Now they prefer diamonds.

I realised that the Jew Yousef had not been cultivating my acquaintance without some purpose; and it was my uncertainty as to what that purpose might be that had prevented me from telling him about my visits to the slave bazaars. In the Orient the stranger is always in the position of the foolish lover, or the son of the family in Molière's comedies. To put an end to his games, I complained that the price of the slave had almost emptied my purse. "What a pity!" cried the

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Jew. "I was going to give you the opportunity of a half share in a splendid piece of business which would have given you your money back ten times in a few days. We are a number of friends who buy the whole harvest of mulberry leaves round about Cairo, and we sell them again at any price we like to the silkworm raisers. All we wanted was a little ready cash; it is one of the rarest things in this country where the legal rate is twenty-four per cent. However, with a reasonable speculation, money multiplies itself. But let us say no more. I will give you one piece of advice. You do not know Arabic: do not employ your dragoman when you wish to speak to your slave; he will put bad ideas into her head without your knowing anything about it, and one day she will run away. It has happened before."

These words made me think.

If it is difficult for a husband to keep his wife, what can a master do? It is the position of Arnolphe or of George Dandin. What could I do? A stranger cannot count upon either eunuch or duenna, and to grant a slave all at once the degree of independence which a Frenchwoman enjoys would be absurd in a country where women, as everybody knows, have no principles to sustain them against the most vulgar forms of seduction. How was I ever to go out alone? and how was I to go out with her in a country where never has a woman shown herself upon a man's arm? Will you believe it? I had never thought of any of this.

I got the Jew to tell Mustapha to prepare dinner for me. Clearly I could not take the slave to dine with me at Domergue's hotel. As for the dragoman, he had gone to wait for the carriage from Suez, for I did not keep him busy enough to prevent his trying to find an occasional Englishman to take round the

## DOMESTIC DUTIES

town. When he came back, I told him that in future I would only employ him on certain days, that I was not going to keep all the crowd who surrounded me, and that, now I had a slave, I should very quickly learn to exchange a few words with her, and that was all I needed. As he had thought himself more indispensable than ever, he was somewhat astonished by this declaration. However, he finally took the matter in good part, and told me that I should find him at the Hotel Waghorn whenever I wanted him.

He had doubtless expected that by acting as my interpreter he would be able to become at least acquainted with the slave, but jealousy is something so well understood in the East, and reserve so natural in all matters connected with women, that he did not even mention her.

I went back into the room where I had left the slave asleep. She was awake, and was now sitting on the window-sill, looking up and down the street through the side lattices of the *moucharaby*. Two houses away there were some young men in modern Turkish costume, doubtless the officers of some important man, smoking nonchalantly before the door. I realised that there was danger on that side. I searched my head in vain for a word which might serve to make her understand that it is not proper to look at soldiers in the street, but I could only think of the universal *tayeb* (very good), an optimistic interjection well fitted to characterise the temperament of the gentlest people on the face of the earth, but absolutely out of place in this particular situation.

Oh women! What changes you bring about. I was happy and content with the world at large. I said *tayeb* at every opportunity, and Egypt smiled upon me. And to-day I have to seek for words which

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perhaps do not even exist in the language of these good-natured people. Certainly I had occasionally surprised in some of the natives a word or a gesture that was negative. If something does not please them, which is rare, they say "*Lah!*" raising their hand carelessly to the level of their foreheads. But how was I to say in a rough tone, yet with a languishing movement of the hand, this word "*Lah!*" But that, for want of anything better, was what I did, and afterwards led the slave to the divan, making a sign to her that it was more becoming to stay there than at the window. Then I gave her to understand that we should soon have dinner.

The problem now was whether I should allow her to have her face unveiled before the cook. That seemed improper. Nobody, until then, had tried to see her. Even the dragoman himself had not gone upstairs when Abd-el-Kerim had shown me his women, and it was clear that I should bring contempt upon myself if I acted otherwise than the people of the country.

When dinner was ready, Mustapha outside cried "*Sidi!*" I went out, and he showed me the casserole containing a fowl chopped up and rice.

"*Bono! bono!*" said I, and went back to get the slave to put on her mask again, which she did.

Mustapha set the table, placed upon it a cloth of green; then, having arranged upon a dish his pyramid of pillau, brought several small plates of green stuff, among which were koukass chopped in vinegar, and slices of great onions in mustard sauce. The medley looked rather good. Then he discreetly retired.

## FIRST LESSONS IN ARABIC

### IV

#### FIRST LESSONS IN ARABIC

I made a sign to the slave to take a chair (I had been weak enough to buy chairs); but she shook her head, and I realised that the table was so low that my idea was silly. So I set cushions on the floor, and sat down on them, inviting her to sit down on the other side, but nothing would induce her to do so. She turned her head away, and covered her mouth with her hand. "My child," said I, "does this mean that you intend to let yourself die of starvation?"

I felt that it was better to speak, even though it was certain that I should not be understood, rather than indulge in an absurd pantomime. She answered in a few words, which doubtless signified that she did not understand, and I replied "*Tayeb*." At any rate, it was the beginning of a conversation.

Lord Byron once said, from his own experience, that the best way of learning a language was to live some time alone with a woman; but surely, it is necessary to have a few simple books too, for otherwise, one learns nothing but nouns, no verbs. Then, it is very difficult to remember words without writing them down, and Arabic is not written in our letters, or at least our letters give a very imperfect idea of the pronunciation. And it is so difficult to learn Arabic writing, with its complicated elisions, that the scholar Volney thought it would be easier to invent a mixed alphabet, but unfortunately his fellow-scholars did not encourage its use. Science loves difficulties, and has no intention of making study too easy. If men taught themselves, what would become of the professors?

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After all, I said to myself, perhaps this young girl, since she was born at Java, is a Hindu. She doubtless lives upon fruit and vegetables. I made a gesture of adoration, at the same time pronouncing in a questioning tone the name of Brahma: she did not seem to understand. But my pronunciation was doubtless incorrect. Then I recounted all the names I knew which had anything at all to do with that system of cosmogony, but I might as well have been speaking French. I began to feel sorry that I had dismissed the dragoman, and I felt particularly annoyed with the slave merchant for selling me this beautiful golden bird without telling me what I ought to give her to eat.

I offered her a plain piece of bread, the very best bread the Frankish quarter could produce, but, in a mournful tone she said "*Mafisch!*" a word that had no meaning for me, and saddened me accordingly. Then I remembered the poor dancing girls who had been taken to Paris some years before, whom I had seen in a house in the Champs-Élysées. These Indian women would only eat food which they had themselves prepared in new vessels. This reassured me somewhat, and I determined, when my own meal was done, that I would go out with the slave and make sure on this point.

The distrust with which the Jew had inspired me for the dragoman had had the further effect of putting me on my guard against himself. It was he who had brought me to this annoying situation. I must certainly discover some safe interpreter, so that I could at least make the acquaintance of my recent acquisition. For a moment I thought of M. Jean, the Mameluke, who was a man of respectable age, but how was I to take the woman to a tavern? On the other hand,

## FIRST LESSONS IN ARABIC

I could not leave her in the house with the cook and the *barbarin* while I went myself to find M. Jean. And even if I had sent these two dangerous servants out, would it be safe to leave a slave alone in a house which had only a wooden bolt to secure it?

Then I heard the sound of little bells tinkling in the street, and through the trellis I saw a goat-herd in a blue smock bringing a few goats towards the Frankish quarter. I pointed him out to the slave, and she smiled and said "*Aioua!*" which I took to mean Yes!

I called the goat-herd, a boy about fifteen years old, dark-skinned with huge eyes, and with the large nose and thick lips of a Sphinx's head, an example of the purest Egyptian type. He came into the courtyard with his flock, and began to milk one into a new vessel of pottery which I showed to the slave before he used it. "*Aioua,*" she said again, and from the gallery, discreetly veiled, watched the operations of the goat-herd.

It was all idyllically simple, and it seemed natural enough that she should say to him "*Talé bouckra,*" two words which I understood to imply that she was telling him to come again the following day. When the cup was full, the goat-herd looked at me with a wild expression and cried: "*At foulouz!*" I had had dealings enough with donkeymen to know that this meant: "Now for the money!" When I had paid him, he cried: "Backsheesh!" another favourite expression of the Egyptians, who demand a tip on the least provocation. I replied: "*Talé bouckra!*" as the slave had done, and he went away satisfied. So languages are learned by easy stages.

She drank her milk without putting any bread in it; but I was somewhat reassured by this light repast. I had been afraid that she might belong to that Javanese

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tribe which lives upon a kind of fatty earth, which probably I could not have got at Cairo. Then I sent for donkeys, and signed to the slave to put on her outer cloak (*milayeh*). She regarded with some disdain this piece of cotton check, though quite good people at Cairo wear it, and said: "*An' aouss habbarah!*"

How quickly one learns! I realised that she lived in hopes of wearing silk instead of cotton, the garments of a lady of fashion instead of those of a woman of the middle-class, and I said "*Lah! Lah!*" waving my hand and shaking my head as the Egyptians do.

### V

#### MY CHARMING INTERPRETER

I had no desire either to go and buy a habbarah or simply to take a walk; but it had suddenly occurred to me that if I went and enrolled myself as a subscriber to the French reading-room, the charming Madame Bonhomme might be good enough to act as interpreter in my first attempt to come to an understanding with my young captive. So far, I had only seen Madame Bonhomme at the famous amateur performance which had opened the season at the *Teatro del Cairo*, but the part she had played then had given me every reason to credit her with all the attributes of an excellent and obliging creature. One curious thing about the theatre is that it gives you the illusion that you are perfectly well acquainted with some woman whom you really do not know at all. Hence the great passions which actresses inspire, though, as a general rule, no man falls in love with a woman whom he has seen only from a distance.



## MY CHARMING INTERPRETER

If an actress has this privilege of offering to the world in general an ideal which may be interpreted and realised at the fancy of the imagination of each individual who sees her, why should not a pretty and, if you wish, a virtuous shopkeeper, be credited with that usually kind, and, so to speak, initiatory, function of opening up to the stranger relations which are both useful and delightful?

You will remember how delighted the good Yorick, unknown, unhappy, lost in the great whirlpool of life at Paris, was when he found a welcome at the house of a charming and complaisant lady who kept a glove-shop; but how much more useful is such a meeting in an Eastern city.

With all the grace and patience in the world, Madame Bonhomme agreed to act as interpreter between the slave and me. There were people in the reading-room, so we were shown into a shop where various articles for ladies were set out for sale. It adjoined the book-shop. In the Frankish quarter, every shopkeeper sells everything. While the astonished slave was delightedly examining the marvels of European luxury, I explained my position to Madame Bonhomme, who herself had a black slave to whom I heard her giving orders from time to time.

My story interested her. I asked her to find out from the slave whether she was satisfied to belong to me. "*Aioua!*" said the slave. To this affirmative reply, she added that she would be quite content to be dressed as a European. This idea made Madame Bonhomme smile; she found a bonnet of tulle with ribbons and put it on the slave's head. I must admit it did not suit her very well, for the whiteness of the bonnet made her look as if she were ill. "My child," Madame Bonhomme said to her, "you must stay as

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you are: the tarboosh is much more becoming to you." And, as the slave seemed to be reluctant to give up the idea of the bonnet, she produced a *tatikos* festooned with gold, such as the Greek women wear, and this time the result was more satisfactory. I realised a certain gentle suggestion that I ought to buy something, but the price was moderate, in spite of the exquisite delicacy of the work.

Being sure that they would now both feel well disposed to me, I had all the adventures of this poor girl told to me in detail. It was like every other story of a slave, from the Andrienne of Terence to Mademoiselle Aïssé. . . . But you must not imagine I flattered myself that I was hearing the whole truth. She was the child of noble parents, snatched away when a babe upon the seashore, a thing which would be unlikely in the Mediterranean at the present day, but which might perhaps have happened in the South Seas. Besides, where else could she have come from? There was no question of her Malay origin. The subjects of the Ottoman Empire may not be sold under any pretext. Anything in the slave line which is neither white nor black is supposed to come either from Abyssinia or from the Indian Archipelago.

She had been sold to a very old sheik who lived at Mecca. This sheik had died, and the merchants of the caravan had taken her along and put her up for sale in Cairo.

This sounded quite natural, and I was glad to be persuaded that, before me, she had had no other possessor than this venerable sheik whom old age had chilled. "She is eighteen years old," Madame Bonhomme told me, "but she is very strong, and you would have had to pay more for her if she did not belong to a race which is rarely seen here. The Turks

## MY CHARMING INTERPRETER

are a people of habit; they insist on Abyssinians or blacks; and you may be sure she has been taken from town to town before they could get rid of her."

"Ah well," said I, "the Fates must have placed me in her way. It was reserved for me to decide her fortune, whether for good or for ill."

This way of looking at the matter, which was strictly in accordance with the fatalism of the Orient, was passed on to the slave. It was favoured with her assent.

I asked her why she had refused to eat that morning and whether she belonged to the Hindu religion.

"No, she is a Mussulman," Madame Bonhomme said, when she had questioned the girl. "She would not have anything to eat to-day, because it is a day of fasting until sunset."

I was rather sorry that she did not belong to the cult of the Brahmans, for which I have always had a weakness. Her language was the purest Arabic, and the only recollection she had of her original tongue was that of a few songs or *pantoums*, which I promised myself I would get her to recite.

"Now," said Madame Bonhomme to me, "how do you propose to converse with her?"

"Madame," said I, "I already know one word which indicates that one is perfectly satisfied; simply tell me another which expresses the contrary. My intelligence will make up for the rest, until such time as I learn more."

"Have you reached the point of refusal already?" said Madame Bonhomme.

"I have some experience," I answered, "and I must be ready for all emergencies."

"Alas!" said Madame Bonhomme in a low voice,

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“ the terrible word you want is ‘ *Mafisch* !’ It includes every possible kind of negation.”

Then I remembered that the slave had already made use of it.

## VI

### THE ISLAND OF RODDAH

The Consul-General had given me an invitation to take a trip with him in the country surrounding Cairo. It was not an offer to be declined, for Consuls enjoy privileges and facilities to visit anything and everything at their convenience. On this occasion, too, I had the advantage of being able to make use of a European carriage, which is a very rare thing in the Levant. A carriage at Cairo is a luxury—the more attractive because it is impossible to make use of one to go about the city. Only sovereigns and their representatives would have the right to run over men and dogs in the streets, if the narrowness and winding nature of those streets would allow them to profit by the privilege. The Pasha himself is obliged to have his stables near the gates, and can only drive out in his carriage to his different country houses. Nothing seems stranger than to see a brougham or a barouche of the latest London or Paris style, with a turbaned coachman on the box, a whip in one hand, and a long cherrywood pipe in the other.

One day, then, there came to me a janissary from the Consulate, who knocked loudly upon my door with his silver-knobbed cane, to do me honour in the neighbourhood. He told me that I was awaited at the Consulate for the excursion which had been arranged. We were to start the next day at dawn; but the Consul did not

## THE ISLAND OF RODDAH

know that since he had first given me the invitation, my bachelor's chambers had become the establishment of a married man, and I wondered what I should have to do with my delightful companion while I was away for a whole day. It would have been indiscreet to take her with me, but to leave her alone with the cook and the porter would have been to lack the most ordinary prudence. I was in a very serious difficulty. Finally, I decided that I should either have to buy eunuchs or put my trust in someone or other. I set her upon a donkey, and soon we stopped outside M. Jean's shop. I asked the former Mameluke whether he did not know some honest household to whom I might entrust my slave for the day. M. Jean, who was a man of resource, suggested an old Copt called Mansour, who, having served several years in the French army, was in every respect worthy of confidence.

Mansour had been a Mameluke like M. Jean, but he had been one of the Mamelukes in the French army. The latter, as he told me, were mostly Copts who had followed our soldiers after the retreat of the Egyptian expedition. Poor Mansour, with several of his comrades, had been thrown into the sea at Marseilles by the populace, because they had supported the Emperor's cause on the return of the Bourbons, but, like a true child of the Nile, he succeeded in keeping afloat and reaching another part of the coast.

To this good fellow's place we went. He lived with his wife in a huge tumble-down house. The ceilings gaped and threatened to fall upon the heads of the inhabitants; the carven woodwork of the windows had holes in it like a torn piece of lace. The only decorations were bits of furniture and rags, and the dust and sun combined to produce an effect as distressing as

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that wrought by the rain and mud in the poorest hovels of our own towns. It gripped my heart to think that the greater part of the population of Cairo was living in houses which even the rats had abandoned because they were so unsafe. Not for a moment would I have left my slave there, but I asked the old Copt and his wife to come to my house. I promised to take them into my service, and to dismiss one or other of the servants I already had. For a piastre and a half, or fourpence a day each, I could hardly be accused of prodigality.

After thus assuring the peace of my home, and having opposed, as clever tyrants do, one faithful people to two who were doubtful and might have conspired against me, I saw no more reason why I should not go to the Consul. His carriage was waiting at the door, filled with things to eat; and two janissaries on horseback were to act as our escort. Besides the Secretary of Legation, there was in our party a grave individual in Oriental dress called the sheik Abou-Khaled. The Consul had invited him to act as our guide. He spoke Italian with ease, and had the reputation of being a most elegant poet and one of the best versed scholars in Arabic literature.

"He is absolutely a man of the past," said the Consul to me. "He detests the *reform*, though it would be difficult to find anyone more tolerant. He belongs to that generation of philosophic Arabs, whom you might even call *Voltaireians*, who are only to be found in Egypt, and he was quite well disposed to the French Government."

I asked the sheik if there were many poets, besides himself, at Cairo. "Alas!" said he, "we no longer live in the days when, as a reward for a fine verse, the sovereign would order a poet's mouth to be filled with

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sequins, as many as it would hold. What use would poetry be, if not to amuse the common people at the street corners?"

"But," said I, "why should not the people themselves play the part of a generous sovereign?"

"They are too poor," replied the sheik, "and besides, they have become so ignorant that they have come to care for nothing but romances droned out artlessly without any thought for purity of style. To amuse the habitués of a café you need no more than a stock of gory or indecent adventures. Then, at the most exciting point, the story-teller stops, and says that he will not go on until he has been paid so much, and he always puts off the climax till the following day, and so goes on for weeks at a time."

"Oh," said I, "it is exactly the same with us."

"As for the famous poems of Antar or Abou-Zeyd," continued the sheik, "they are never heard now except at religious festivals—out of custom, pure and simple. Can we even be sure that many people understand their beauties? The people in our time hardly know how to read. Who would ever have imagined that the two most learned scholars, of all those who know Arabic literature, would be two Frenchmen?"

"He means," said the Consul, "Doctor Perron and M. Fresnel, the Consul at Jeddah. But you have," he added, turning to the sheik, "many holy ulemas with white beards who spend all their time in the libraries of the mosques."

"Do you call it learning," said the sheik, "to spend all one's life, smoking a narghile and reading over and over again the same little set of books, on the pretence that nothing is more beautiful and that their doctrine is above all other things? It would be better to renounce our glorious past and open our minds to the

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science of the Franks . . . though they, indeed, learned all they know from us."

We had passed the city walls and left on our right Boulaq and the gay country houses which surround it, and now were bowling along, through cultivated fields, a broad and shady avenue, which crosses a vast plain belonging to Ibrahim. It is he who has planted this formerly sterile plain with date-palms, mulberry-trees and Pharaoh's fig-trees, so that to-day it looks like a garden. Large factory buildings stand amid these cultivated fields some distance from the Nile. Passing them, and turning to the right, we came to an arcade by which we go down to the river to reach the island of Roddah.

In this part, the arm of the Nile seems like a little stream flowing among kiosks and gardens. There are clumps of reeds by the shores, and tradition points out this place as that where Pharaoh's daughter found the cradle of Moses. Turning towards the South, we see on the right the port of old Cairo, and on the left the buildings of *Mekkias* or *Nilometer*, with their minarets and cupolas, which stand at the end of the island.

This island is not only a delightful princely residence. Thanks to Ibrahim's efforts, it has become the Botanical Gardens of Cairo. Remember that it is precisely the opposite of our own. Instead of concentrating heat by hot-houses, here rain and cold and fog have to be produced artificially in order to grow our European plants. The fact is, that out of all our trees only one poor little oak has yet been raised, and that has never produced an acorn. In the cultivation of Indian plants, Ibrahim has been more fortunate. Their type of vegetation is quite different from that of Egypt, and in this latitude it shows some signs of feeling the cold. We walked delightedly beneath the shade of tamarinds



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and baobabs; cocoanut palms with their long straight stems flaunted their fern-like foliage, but amid all these masses of strange vegetation, what seemed to me most exquisitely graceful were the avenues of bamboos which formed a curtain like our poplars. A little stream meandered about the grass, and peacocks and pink flamingoes blazed amid a host of tame birds. From time to time we rested beneath the shade of a kind of weeping-willow, whose lofty trunk, straight as a mast, spread around it a curtain of thick foliage, so that one might believe oneself to be within a tent of green silk, flooded by a gentle light.

We found it hard to drag ourselves away from this magic scene, from this coolness, these penetrating odours of another part of the world, to which it seemed we had been miraculously transported; but, as we walked to the north of the island, we soon came upon an entirely different type of nature, which was doubtless intended to complete the scale of tropical vegetation. In the midst of a wood of those blossoming trees which look like gigantic bouquets, you come, by narrow paths, hidden beneath vaults of climbing plants, to a sort of labyrinth which climbs over imitation rocks, and has a belvedere at the top. Among the stones, beside the footpaths, over your head and beneath your feet, the strangest reptiles of the vegetable world twist and turn, bristle and grimace. With some uneasiness you set your foot in these lairs of sleeping hydras and serpents, amid this almost living vegetation, some of which seems to make a travesty of the human form, and brings to mind the monstrous conformation of the many-limbed gods of India.

When I reached the top, I was filled with admiration, for, beyond Ghizeh on the other side of the river, I could plainly see the three pyramids standing out

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clearly against the azure sky. I had never seen them so well before, and although we were three leagues away from them, the clearness of the air showed every detail.

I do not share the opinion of Voltaire, who suggests that the pyramids of Egypt are far from having the importance of her incubators, and I cannot stand in the presence of forty centuries without emotion; but that particular moment the view interested me more from the point of view of Cairo and the Arabs. I hastened to ask our companion, the sheik, what he thought of the four thousand years which European science attributes to these monuments.

The old man sat down on the wooden divan in the kiosk. "There are some authors," he said, "who believe the pyramids to have been built by the pre-adamite king Gian-ben-Gian, but, according to a tradition which enjoys a greater vogue among us, three hundred years before the Deluge there lived a king called Saurid, son of Salahoc, who dreamed one night that all things on the earth were turned topsy-turvey, men falling on their faces and houses on the men; the stars collided in the heavens and the débris covered the ground to a great depth. The king awoke in a fright, entered the Temple of the Sun, and there remained a long time bathing his cheeks and weeping. Then he called together the priests and diviners. The priest Akliman, the most learned of them all, declared that he too had dreamed such a dream. 'I dreamed,' said he, 'that I was with you upon a mountain, and that I saw the heavens descend so low that they came almost to our heads, while all the people ran in a host to you as to a refuge, and you lifted your hands above your head, and tried to push back the heavens, and prevent them from coming lower, and I, seeing you act

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thus, myself did likewise. At that moment there came a voice from the sun which said to us: "The sky shall go back unto its place when I have turned three hundred times." And when the priest had so spoken, King Saurid had the heights of the stars taken that he might know what happening they foreboded. And it was foretold that first there should be a deluge of water and then again a deluge of fire. It was then that the king had built the pyramids in the angular form that might best sustain the shock of the stars, and laid those enormous stones, bound together by rods of iron, and hewn with such accuracy that neither the fire of heaven nor the flood could penetrate them. Thither, in case of need, the king and the great ones of his kingdom were to flee, with the books and pictures of the sciences, and talismans and all that must be preserved for the benefit of the future of the human race."

I listened with great attention to this legend, and said to the Consul that it seemed to me much more satisfying than the opinion generally held in Europe that these monstrous buildings had been no more than tombs.

"But," said I, "how could the people breathe who had thus fled to the halls within the pyramids?"

"There are still to be seen," said the sheik, "wells and canals which lose themselves beneath the earth. Some of them communicated with the waters of the Nile, others with vast underground caves; the waters entered by narrow conduits and came out farther on in immense cataracts, shaking the air incessantly with a frightful roar."

The Consul, who had a matter-of-fact mind, listened to these traditions with a smile; he had taken advantage of our halt at the kiosk to have set out upon a table the provisions that had been brought in his carriage, and

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the *bostangis* of Ibrahim Pasha also came to offer us rare fruits and flowers, perfectly calculated to enhance our Asiatic sensations.

In Africa, people dream about India, as, in Europe, people dream about Africa: the ideal always shines beyond our actual horizon. I continued to question our good sheik with eagerness, and I made him tell me all the fabulous stories his fathers had known. With him, I believed more fervently in King Saurid than in the Cheops of the Greeks, their Chephren and their Mycerinus.

"And what was found," I asked him, "when the pyramids were opened for the first time under the Arab sultans?"

"They found," said he, "statues and talismans which King Saurid had set to be for guards in each one. The guard of the eastern pyramid was an idol of black and white tortoiseshell, seated upon a throne of gold, and holding in his hand a lance which none could look upon and live. The spirit belonging to that idol was a beautiful and laughing woman, who has appeared again in our own time, and caused many of those who have met her to lose their minds. The guard of the western pyramid was an idol of red stone, armed likewise with a lance, and having upon its head a coiled serpent; the spirit which served him had the shape of an old Nubian, bearing a basket on his head and in his hands a censer. And the third pyramid had for guard a little idol of basalt, with a base of the same, which drew towards itself all those who looked upon it, without their being able to get loose. Its spirit appeared in the form of a young and beardless naked man. And the other pyramids of Saccarah, each has its spectre: one is an old man, sunburnt and dark, with a short beard; the other a young black woman, with

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a black child, and when one looks upon her, she shows long white teeth and white eyes; another has a lion's head with horns; another is like a shepherd clothed in black, holding a staff; and again another appears in the shape of a holy man coming out of the sea and gazing at his reflection in the waters. It is dangerous to meet these phantoms at the hour of noon."

"So," said I, "the East has spectres of the day as we have those of the night."

"Because," observed the Consul, "in these countries everybody has to go to sleep at noon, and this good sheik is telling us stories well fitted to induce slumber."

"But," I cried, "is it any more extraordinary than so many natural things which we cannot possibly explain? Since we believe in the Creation, in angels, and the Flood; and since we cannot fail to admit the movement of the stars, why should we not agree that spirits may be attached to those stars, and that our earliest ancestors may have been able to get into relation with them through their worship and their monuments?"

"Such was indeed the aim of primitive magic," said the sheik. "The talismans and the figures only acquired power from their consecration to each of the planets, and the signs related to their rise and their decline. The prince of the priests was called Kater, which means master of the influences. Below him, each priest had a star of his own to serve, like *Pharou's* (Saturn), *Rhaouïs* (Jupiter), and the rest.

"And each morning the Kater would say to a priest, 'Where is now the star whom you serve?' and he would make reply, 'He is in such a sign, such a degree, such a minute,' and after due calculation had been made, they wrote down what it was fit and proper to do that

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day. So, then, the first pyramid was reserved for the princes and their families; the second was to contain the idols of the stars and the tabernacles of the heavenly bodies, with the books of astrology, history and science; there the priests also were to seek refuge. The third was destined only to preserve the coffins of kings and priests, and as it soon became insufficient, the pyramids of Saccarah and Daschour were built. The aim of the solidity used in the building was to prevent the destruction of the embalmed bodies, which, according to the ideas of those days, were to be reborn at the end of a certain revolution of the stars, the period of which cannot be exactly identified."

"If that be true," said the Consul, "one of these days some of those mummies will be very much astonished when they wake up in the glass case of a museum, or in the private collection of some Englishman."

"Really," said I, "they are true human chrysalides from which the butterfly has not yet come. Who shall say that it will not come forth one day? I have always thought it was a desecration to strip and dissect the mummies of these poor Egyptians. How is it that this consoling and invincible faith held by so many accumulated generations could not disarm the senseless curiosity of the Europeans? We respect those who died yesterday, but have the dead any age?"

"They were infidels," said the sheik.

"Alas," said I, "at that time neither Mohammed nor Jesus was born."

We discussed this point for some time, and I was astonished to find a Mussulman imitating the intolerance of a Catholic. Why should the children of Ishmael curse the Egypt of antiquity, which only reduced the seed of Isaac to slavery? However, to

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tell the truth, the Mussulmans generally respect the tombs and sacred monuments of different peoples, and only the hope of finding an immense treasure caused a caliph to have the pyramids opened. Their chronicles tell how, in the room called the King's Chamber, there was found a statue of a man in black stone, and the statue of a woman in white stone, both upright upon a table, one holding a lance and the other a bow. On the middle of the table was a vessel hermetically sealed, and this, when it was opened, was found to be full of blood that was still fresh. There was also a cock of red gold, enamelled with hyacinth, which crowed and beat its wings when the room was entered. All this is rather reminiscent of the *Thousand and One Nights*, but there is nothing to prevent us from believing that these rooms contained talismans and cabalistic figures? One thing is certain: the moderns found there no other bones than those of an ox. The supposed sarcophagus of the King's Chamber was undoubtedly a tank for lustral water. Besides, is it not more absurd, as Volney has observed, to suppose that so many stones were heaped one upon another simply to place there a corpse no more than five feet long?

## VII

### THE VICEROY'S HAREM

Soon afterwards, we continued our walk, and paid a visit to a delightful palace with much scroll-work ornamentation, where the Viceroy's wives sometimes come and spend the summer. Little flowerbeds in the Turkish style, representing the designs of a carpet, surround this residence, into which we were freely

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allowed to go. The birds were not in the cage, and in all the rooms there was nothing more alive than the musical timepieces which announced each quarter of an hour by a musical-box tune from some French opera. The arrangement of a harem is the same in all Turkish palaces, and I had already seen several. There are always a number of little rooms surrounding the large halls. There are divans everywhere, and the only furniture consists of little tortoiseshell tables. Little arches cut into the wainscoting hold narghiles, vases of flowers, and coffee cups. Three or four rooms, decorated in the European style, contain a few trumpery bits of furniture which would do honour to a porter's lodge; but they are only sacrifices to progress, the whim perhaps of some favourite, and none of these things is put to any serious use.

The one thing which these harems, even the most princely of them, seem to lack, is a bed.

"Where do they sleep, these women and their slaves?" I asked the sheik.

"On the divans."

"But have they no coverlets?"

"They sleep fully dressed. But there are woollen or silken covers for the winter-time."

"That is all very well, but where is the husband's place?"

"Oh, the husband sleeps in his room and the women in theirs, and the slaves (*odaleuk*) on the divans in the larger rooms. If the divans and the cushions do not make a comfortable bed, mattresses are put down in the middle of the room, and they sleep there."

"Fully dressed?"

"Always, but only in the most simple of clothes, trousers, vest, and robe. The law forbids men as well as women to uncover themselves before the other sex,



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anywhere below the neck. It is a husband's privilege to look freely upon his wives' faces, but if curiosity should take him any further, his eyes are accursed: there is a very definite text upon the subject."

"I can understand," I said, "that the husband does not greatly care to pass the night in a room filled with women fully dressed, and that he is ready enough to sleep in his own; but if he takes two or three of these ladies with him . . ."

"Two or three!" cried the sheik indignantly, "what dogs do you imagine would act in any such way? God alive! is there a woman in the world, even an infidel, who would consent to share her husband's honourable couch with another? Is that how they behave in Europe?"

"In Europe," I replied, "certainly not; but the Christians have only one wife, and they imagine that the Turks, who have several, live with them as with one only."

"If there were Mussulmans so depraved as to act as the Christians imagine, their lawful wives would immediately demand a divorce, and even their slaves would have the right to leave them."

"See," said I to the Consul, "how wrong Europe still is in her judgment of the customs of these peoples. To us the life of the Turks seems the very apotheosis of power and of pleasure, yet I find they are not masters even in their own houses."

"As a matter of fact," the Consul replied, "nearly all of them have only one wife. Daughters of good family almost always make this a condition of marriage. A man who is wealthy enough to feed and keep several wives in due style, that is to say, to give to each a separate dwelling, a maid, and two complete sets of clothes each year, as well as a fixed sum each month

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for upkeep, can, it is true, take as many as four wives; but the law obliges him to spend one day of the week with each of them, and that is not always very pleasant. Then think how the intrigues of four wives, practically equal in rights, render his existence as miserable as can be imagined, unless he is a very wealthy man of high position. In such a case, a number of wives is a luxury like a number of horses, but as a rule they prefer to limit themselves to one lawful wife, and to have beautiful slaves, with whom indeed their relations are not always too simple, especially if their wives are of good birth."

"Poor Turks!" I cried. "How they are slandered. If it is only a question of having a mistress here and a mistress there, every rich man in Europe has the same facilities."

"He has more," said the Consul. "In Europe, our institutions are very strict upon such points, but in morals we are apt to get our own back. Here, religion, which governs everything, dominates the social and the moral orders at one and the same time, and as it commands nothing that is impossible, its believers make it a point of honour to carry out its precepts. Not that there are not exceptions, but they are rare, and they have only been possible since the reform. Devout folk at Constantinople were very indignant with Mahmoud, when they heard that he had had a magnificent bath made where he could be present at the toilette of his women: very probably he did nothing of the sort, and the whole story was invented by Europeans."

As we talked, we went along paths paved with oval pebbles in black and white patterns, with a high border of clipped box. In my mind's eye I saw the white cadines about the avenues, trailing their slippers along

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the mosaic pavement, gathering in these halls of green foliage, where tall yew-trees form arcades and balusters, and the doves sometimes come to rest like the plaintive spirits of this solitude.

We returned to Cairo, after having visited the building of Nilometer, where a graduated column, formerly consecrated to Seramis, goes down into a deep basin, and records the height of each year's floods. The Consul then decided to take us to the cemetery of the Pasha's family. To see the cemetery after the harem was to invite a melancholy comparison, but here indeed there is something which does give rise to a reasonable criticism of polygamy. This cemetery, which is devoted to the children of one family alone, looks as if it might be that of a city. There are more than sixty tombs, large and small, most of them new, made of small columns of white marble. Each of these columns is surmounted either by a turban or by a woman's head-dress, which gives all the Turkish tombs a character of funereal reality. One feels as though one were walking through a host of people turned to stone. The most important of these graves are draped in rich stuffs and have upon them turbans of silk or cashmere, and then the illusion is more poignant still.

It is consoling to reflect that, in spite of all these losses, the Pasha's family is still fairly numerous. Besides, the mortality of Turkish children in Egypt seems a fact as old as it is incontestable. The famous Mamelukes, who so long were masters of the country, and brought there the most beautiful women in the world, did not leave a single scion of their race behind them.

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## VIII

### THE MYSTERIES OF THE HAREM

I meditated upon what I had heard.

So still another illusion must be banished: the delights of the harem, the omnipotence of the husband or the master, charming women uniting to provide happiness for a single man. Religion or custom has strangely tempered an ideal which has attracted so many Europeans. Those who, relying upon our preconceived ideas, formed such an opinion of Oriental life, have very quickly become discouraged. The majority of the Franks who once entered the Pasha's service, and embraced Islam, either for what they imagined to be its pleasures or for what they could get out of it, have to-day returned if not to the bosom of the Church, at least to the delights of Christian monogamy.

Let us be quite sure of one thing. Throughout the Turkish Empire, a married woman has the same privileges as with us. She can even prevent her husband from taking a second wife, if she makes that a condition of her marriage contract. And, if she does consent to live in the same house as another wife, she has the right to live entirely separately, and she does not take part with the slaves, as people imagine, in any delightful tableau, beneath the eye of a master and a spouse. We must not even imagine that these beautiful ladies will condescend to sing or dance to provide diversion for their lord. The possession of such talents would seem to them unworthy of a respectable woman, but every man has the right to bring into his harem *almées* and *ghawasies*, and let them provide diversion for his

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wives. And the master of a seraglio must take care not to become too interested in the slaves he has given his wives, for they have become their personal property; and if he should wish to acquire one for his own service, he would be wise to set her up in some other establishment, although there is nothing to prevent him from adopting this means of increasing his posterity.

You should know, too, that each house being divided into two parts absolutely separated one from the other, one for the men and the other for the women, there is a master on one side, but a mistress on the other. The latter is the mother or the mother-in-law, or the wife of longest standing, or she who has borne the eldest child. The first wife is called *the great lady*, the second *the parrot* (durrah). When there are many women, which only happens in the case of people of position, the harem is a kind of convent governed by a rigid rule. Its main occupation is that of bringing up the children, embroidery, and the direction of the slaves in household work. A visit from the husband is a ceremonial affair, as is that of near relatives, and, as he does not take his meals with his wives, all he can do to pass the time is to smoke his narghile seriously, and drink coffee or sherbets. It is the proper thing for him to give notice of his coming some time in advance. Moreover, if he finds slippers at the harem door, he must not go in, for it is a sign that his wife or his wives are receiving guests, and such guests often stay a day or two.

As for freedom to go out and pay calls, a woman of free birth undoubtedly possesses it. The husband's right in this matter is limited to sending slaves to accompany her, but as a precaution, that is of little consequence, for it would be perfectly easy for the wives, either to buy the slaves over or else to go out in disguise, either from the bath or from one of their friends'

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houses, whilst the attendants were watching at the door. In reality, the mask and uniformity of dress would give them much greater freedom than Europeans, if they were inclined to go in for intrigues. The merry stories told at night in the cafés often deal with the adventures of lovers who disguise themselves as women so as to make their way into some harem. Nothing could be simpler, but it must be admitted that such an idea is more in keeping with the imagination of the Arabs than with Turkish customs, and it is the latter which have dominated the whole Orient for two centuries. Further, the Mussulman is not prone to adultery and would consider it revolting to possess a woman who did not absolutely belong to him.

It is very seldom that a Christian is lucky in such love affairs. Formerly there was a double danger of death; now only the woman risks her life, and that only if she is actually caught in her husband's house. Except in this case, adultery is only a reason for divorce and some comparatively trifling punishment.

There is, then, nothing in the Mussulman law which, as people have chosen to believe, reduces women to a condition of slavery and abjection. They can inherit, they can own personal property, as in any other country, and even without the interference of their husbands. They have the right to initiate a divorce for definite reasons which the law allows. The husband's privilege is that he can divorce without giving any reason. All that he needs to do is to say to his wife before three witnesses, "You are divorced," and after that she can only claim the dowry laid down in her marriage contract. As everyone knows, if he later wishes to take her back, he can only do so if she has remarried in the intervening time, and again become free. The story of the *bullâ*, who, in Egypt, is called *musthilla*, and plays the part

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of an intermediary husband, is occasionally enacted, but only in the case of wealthy people. The poor, who marry without any written contract, leave one another and come together again without any trouble. Again, though it is especially people of importance who practise polygamy, either out of ostentation or because they like it, there are at Cairo some poor devils who marry several women so as to live on the money the women earn. They have three or four families in the city who are completely unaware of each other's existence. When these mysteries come to light, there are usually comical disputes and the expulsion of the lazy fellah from the hearths of his different wives, for, if the law allows him several, on the other hand it imposes upon him the obligation of supporting them all.

### IX

#### THE FRENCH LESSON

I found my house as I had left it. The old Copt and his wife busy setting everything in order, the slave asleep on a divan, the cocks and hens pecking maize in the courtyard, and the *barbarin* smoking at the café opposite—all awaited me as they should have done. But I could not find the cook. The Copt's arrival had doubtless put the idea into his head that he was about to be replaced, and he had gone off without a word, as very frequently happens with the servants and working people of Cairo. They take care to be paid every day, so that they can do what they please in such matters.

I could not see any reason why I should not replace Mustapha by Mansour, and his wife, who came to assist

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him in the daytime, seemed an excellent guardian of the morals of my home. There was but one thing, this excellent couple had not the faintest idea of the elements of cookery, even Egyptian. Their own nourishment consisted of cooked maize and vegetables chopped in vinegar, and this had not taught them the arts either of sauce-making or of roasting. Whatever they essayed in this direction drew shrieks from the slave, who heaped abuses on them. This characteristic behaviour I found highly displeasing.

I told Mansour to tell her that it was now her turn to do the cooking, and that, as I proposed to take her with me on my travels, she would do well to prepare herself. I cannot reproduce the expression of wounded pride, or, rather, offended dignity with which she overwhelmed us.

"Tell the *sidi*," she said to Mansour, "that I am a *cadine* (lady) and not an *odaleuk* (servant), and if he does not give me the position that is my due, I shall write to the Pasha."

"The Pasha?" I cried. "What has the Pasha to do with it? I take a slave, I do, so as to have someone to wait on me, and if, as may very well be the case, I have not the means to pay for servants, I don't see why she should not do the work as women do in every country."

"She says," said Mansour, "that by writing to the Pasha every slave has the right to have herself resold, and so to change her master. She belongs to the Mussulman religion, and will never demean herself by such low occupations."

I think highly of independence in any individual, and since she had the right—and Mansour assured me that she had—I contented myself with saying that I had been joking, but that she must apologise for the nasty temper



## THE FRENCH LESSON

she had shown the old man. Mansour, however, I am sure, interpreted that in such a way that the apologies were all on his side.

It was clear that I had been a fool to buy this woman. If she persisted in these ideas, and would be nothing but an expense to me for the rest of my journey, at least she might act as an interpreter. So I told her that since she was so distinguished a person, it would be good for her to learn French while I was learning Arabic. This idea she did not reject.

I gave her a lesson in speaking and writing; I made her draw hooks and crochets on paper as if she were a child, and taught her a few words. This she found amusing, and when she pronounced the French, she lost that guttural intonation which sounds so unpleasant in the mouth of Arab women. I found it very entertaining to get her to pronounce whole phrases which she did not understand. "I am a little savage," for example, which she pronounced, "*Eh em a leedle sovidge.*" When she saw me laughing, she thought I had made her say something improper, and asked Mansour to translate the phrase. Finding no great harm in it, she repeated very charmingly, "*Ana? (me?) leedle sovidge? . . . mafisch! (not at all!)*" Her smile was delightful.

When she was tired of drawing strokes, thick and thin, the slave gave me to understand that she wished to write whatever she thought fit. I thought she must know how to write Arabic, and gave her a clean sheet of paper. Soon I saw coming from her fingers the oddest series of hieroglyphics, which obviously belonged to no known system of calligraphy. When the page was full, I got Mansour to ask her what she had been trying to do.

"I was writing to you: read it!" said she.

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"But, my dear child, it doesn't mean anything. It is just what a cat might have done after putting its claws in the ink."

This greatly astonished her. She had thought that every time one thought of anything and passed one's hand at random over the paper, the idea must convey itself clearly to the reader. I undeceived her, and told her to say what it was she had wished to write, seeing that more time than she had supposed was necessary in such a matter of education.

Her simple request included several points. First, she again produced her suggestion that she should wear a habbarah of black silk like the Cairo ladies, so that she should not be mistaken for a simple fellah woman; then she desired a dress (*yalek*) of green silk; and, thirdly, she wished to buy some yellow shoes which, as a Mussulman, she had the right to wear.

I must explain that these shoes are hideous things which give women a most unattractive web-footed appearance, while the other garments make them look like huge great bundles. But, especially in the case of the yellow shoes, a serious question of social standing is involved. I promised to think about the matter.

## X

### CHOUBRAH

My reply being apparently favourable, the slave jumped up and clapped her hands, repeating several times: "*El fil! el fil!*"

"What does she mean?" I asked Mansour.

"The *siti* (lady)," he told me, "would like to go

## CHOUBRAH

and see an elephant she has heard about which is at Mehemet Ali's palace at Choubrah."

It was only right that her devotion to study should be rewarded, and I sent for donkeymen. The city gate, on the Choubrah side, was only a hundred yards from our house. It is a gate still fortified by towers, which date from the time of the Crusades. Then the traveller goes over the bridge which crosses a canal which widens to the left, and forms a small lake with fresh vegetation all around it. Casinos, cafés and public gardens take advantage of this freshness and this shade. On Sundays, many Greek and Armenian women come there with ladies from the Frankish quarter. They only take off their veils when they are actually within the gardens, and then it is possible to make a study of these curiously contrasting races of the Levant. Beyond, horses and riders disappear beneath the foliage of the avenue of Choubrah, most certainly the finest avenue in the world. The sycamores and ebony-trees which, for the space of a league, cast their shadows upon it, are of enormous girth, and the vault which their branches form is so thick that over all the road there prevails a kind of darkness, which finds a contrast in the distance in the burning fringe of the desert, glowing on the right, beyond the cultivated ground. On the left is the Nile, which flows through great gardens for half a league, until it meets the avenue itself, and lights it with the empurpled reflection from its waters. There is a café with fountains and trellises, half the way to Choubrah, which is greatly favoured by promenaders. On the right stretch fields of maize and sugar cane, with here and there a few country houses, and at last we reach the great buildings which belong to the Pasha.

Here was being shown a white elephant which had

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been given to His Highness by the English Government. My companion was delighted beyond all measure and could not admire this animal too greatly. It reminded her of her own country, and, even in Egypt, was something out of the way. There were bands of silver round its tusks, and its driver made it perform several tricks for us. He even made it take up various positions the decency of which seemed doubtful to me, and as I was making a sign to the slave, who was veiled but not blind, that we had seen enough, one of the Pasha's officers said to me gravely: "*Aspettate . . . è per ricreare le donne*" (Wait, it is to amuse the ladies). Indeed, there were several ladies present, who did not seem the least bit scandalised, and roared with laughter.

Choubrah is a delightful place in which to live. The palace of the Pasha of Egypt, simple in style and of some antiquity, looks out upon the Nile and over the Embabeh plain, famous for the rout of the Mamelukes. On the garden side a kiosk has been built, whose galleries, painted and gilded, have a most brilliant appearance. It is indeed a triumph of Eastern taste.

The interior may be visited. There are aviaries of rare birds, reception rooms, bath rooms, billiard rooms, and when one goes further into the palace itself, those uniform rooms with Turkish decoration but European furniture which seem to indicate the height of luxury in all princely dwellings. Landscapes in tempera, without any perspective, painted on the panels and over the doors, orthodox pictures wherein no living creature appears, are not calculated to give us too high an opinion of Egyptian art. However, the artists allow themselves a few fabulous creatures such as dolphins, winged horses and sphinxes. In pictures of battles they can only depict sieges and fights

## CHOUBRAH

at sea; vessels whose sailors are not to be seen attack fortresses whose garrisons defend themselves without appearing. There are exchanges of fire and bombs, but they seem to be independent of human agency; wood sets out to conquer stone, and man is absent. However, this was the only way in which the principal scenes of Ibrahim's campaign in Greece could be represented.

Above the hall where the Pasha dispenses justice, there is inscribed this excellent maxim: "A quarter of an hour's mercy is worth more than seventy hours of prayer."

We went down into the gardens. What roses! The roses of Choubrah are the only ones of which men speak in Egypt. Those of Fayoum are only used for oil and sweetmeats. The *bostangis* came and offered them to us. Another of the Pasha's luxuries is to leave ungathered the lemons and the oranges, so that these golden apples may the longer delight the visitor's eyes. And when they have fallen of themselves, anyone may pick them up. But I have said nothing of the garden. It is possible to criticise the taste of Orientals as far as their interiors are concerned, but their gardens are beyond all criticism. On all sides are orchards, arbours, and even rooms formed by clipped yew-trees which remind us of the Renaissance style; they are just like the landscapes of the "Decameron." Probably the first models were created by Italian gardeners. There are no statues to be seen, but the fountains are in exquisite taste.

A glazed pavilion, which crowns a succession of terraces built up like a pyramid, stands out against the horizon like something from fairyland. The caliph Haroun certainly never had one more beautiful; but this is not yet all. We go down again after admiring

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the splendour of the interior and the silken draperies which fly loose in the wind among garlands and festoons of green foliage; and then along long avenues bordered with lemon-trees cut in the shape of a distaff; pass through groves of banana-trees whose transparent leaves shine like emeralds, and so come, at the other end of the garden, to a bath too wonderful and too well known to be discussed at length here. It is an immense basin of white marble, surrounded by galleries supported by columns in the Byzantine style, and in the middle a tall fountain, from which the water spurts out through the mouths of crocodiles. The whole place is lighted by gas, and on summer nights the Pasha has himself rowed about the basin in a golden boat, with the women of his harem at the oars. These beautiful ladies bathe beneath their master's eyes, though they wear wrappers of silken crêpe. The Koran, as we know, does not allow the nude.

## XI

### THE AFFRITS

I did not think that to study in one woman of the Orient what was probably the character of many others was a useless proceeding, and should hate to attach too great an importance to matters of detail. But you may imagine my surprise when, one morning, entering the slave's room, I found a garland of onions hanging across the door, and other onions symmetrically arranged above the place where she was sleeping. Thinking that it was but a childish fancy, I took down these ornaments which seemed to me ill fitted as a decoration for the room, and threw them out carelessly

## THE AFFRITS

into the courtyard. The slave got up in a rage and a terrible state of distress, and went out in tears to pick up the onions and put them back again with every sign of devotion. I had to await Mansour's arrival for the explanation. Meanwhile I was deluged with curses, the most obvious of which was clearly the word *Pharaoh*. I was not quite sure whether I ought to be angry or sorry. At last Mansour arrived, and I learned that I had interfered with a spell, and that I should be the cause of most frightful misfortunes which would fall upon both her and myself. After all, I said to Mansour, we are living in a country where onions once were gods, and if I have offended them, I ask nothing better than to recognise the fact. There must be some way of appeasing the resentment of an Egyptian onion. But the slave would not hear a word and kept on looking at me and repeating "*Pharaoh!*" Mansour told me that this word meant "an impious and tyrannical creature." I was grieved at such a reproach, but very glad to learn that the name of the ancient kings of this country had become an injurious epithet. However, there was nothing to get angry about; I was assured that this onion ceremony was customary in the Cairo houses on one particular day of the year, and that it was directed against epidemics.

The fears of the poor girl were justified, probably as the result of her startled imagination. She did become rather seriously ill, but she would not do anything a doctor told her in spite of all I could do. During my absence, she had called two women who lived in the next house, speaking from our terrace to theirs, and I found them installed by her side, reciting prayers and, as Mansour told me, making spells against the affrits or evil spirits. It appeared that my desecration of the onions had annoyed these evil spirits, and

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that two of them were particularly hostile to each of us, one called the Green and the other the Golden.

Seeing that the evil lay mostly in the slave's imagination, I allowed the two women to do what they liked, and at last they brought another, very old one. She was a famous *santone*. With her she brought a brazier, which she set in the middle of the room, and on it burned a stone which looked to me like alum. The object of this was greatly to annoy the affrits, whom the women saw distinctly in the smoke. They asked for mercy. But as the evil had to be utterly uprooted, the slave was got up; she leaned over the smoke, which made her cough severely. Meanwhile, the old woman patted her on the back, and in a mournful voice they all sang prayers and imprecations in Arabic.

Mansour, as a Coptic Christian, was shocked by all these practices; but if the sickness arose from some moral cause, what harm could there be in allowing it to be treated in a similar manner? Anyhow, the next day there was an obvious improvement, and a cure followed.

The slave refused to be separated from the two neighbours she had called in, and continued to have them to wait upon her. One was called Cartoum, the other Zabetta. I saw no need to have so many people in the house, and took good care not to offer them any wages, but she made them presents from her own belongings, and as these were what Abd-el-Kerim had left to her, there was nothing for me to say. However, it was necessary to replace them by others, and to arrange for the so much desired acquisition of the *habbarah* and the *yalek*.

Life in the Orient plays these tricks upon us. At first everything seems so simple, so cheap, so easy. But soon one is involved in a complication of necessities,



## THE AFFRITS

things that are customary, fancies, and dragged against one's will into a pasha-like existence which, joined to the disorder and irregularity of accounts, is enough to exhaust the best-filled purses. I had intended to spend some time initiating myself into the more intimate life of Egypt, but little by little I saw the resources upon which I relied for any further travels being drained away.

"My poor child," I said to the slave, by way of explaining the situation to her, "if you wish to stay at Cairo, you are *free*."

I expected an outburst of gratitude.

"Free!" said she, "and what do you expect me to do? Free! and where am I to go? Rather sell me back to Abd-el-Kerim."

"But, my dear, no European ever sells a woman. It would be disgraceful to receive money in such a way."

"Well," said she, weeping, "can I earn my living? Is there a thing that I can do?"

"Can you not go in service to a lady of your own religion?"

"Me, a servant? Never. Sell me back again; I shall be bought by a *muslim*, by a sheik, perhaps by a pasha. I can become a great lady. If you wish to get rid of me . . . take me to the bazaar."

What a strange country, where slaves do not wish for liberty!

I realised, well enough, that she was right, and I already knew enough of the true state of Mussulman society to be quite sure that her position as a slave would be much superior to that of the poor Egyptian women employed at the roughest work, and miserable with their miserable husbands. To give her her freedom was to give her over to misery, perhaps to

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shame, and I regarded myself as morally responsible for her fate.

“Since you do not wish to stay at Cairo,” I said at last, “you will have to go with me to other lands.”

“*Ana enté sava-sava*” (I and you will go together) ! she replied.

I was content with this decision, and went to the port of Boulaq to engage a small boat to take us down that branch of the Nile which goes from Cairo to Damietta.

## PART IV

### THE PYRAMIDS

#### I

#### THE CLIMB

I HAD determined to visit the pyramids before I left, and I went to see the Consul-General to ask his advice about this expedition. He decided to make it with me, and we went together towards old Cairo. On the way, he seemed depressed, and when we were crossing the plain of Karafeh, suffered a good deal from a harsh, dry cough.

I knew that he had been ill for a long time, and he had himself told me that he would like at least to see the pyramids before he died. I thought he was exaggerating the state of his health, but when we reached the banks of the Nile, he said: "I feel tired already, and I would rather stay here. Take the boat I arranged for. I will watch you and imagine myself with you. One thing I ask you. Count the exact number of the steps of the great pyramid—the scholars don't agree about their number, and if you go as far as the pyramids of Saccarah, I shall be grateful if you will bring me back an ibis mummy. I should like to compare the old Egyptian ibis with that degenerate breed of curlew which is still found on the banks of the Nile."

So I had to embark alone at the end of the Isle of Roddah, pondering sadly that confidence characteristic

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of invalids, which enables them to think of collecting mummies when they stand on the brink of their own graves.

The branch of the Nile between Roddah and Ghizeh is so wide that it takes about half an hour to make the crossing.

After going through Ghizeh, without giving much heed to its cavalry school or its poultry farms, without examining too closely its crumbling ruins, whose great walls are peculiarly constructed with vessels of earth superimposed and adapted in the masonry itself, a form of construction light and airy rather than substantial, there were still two leagues of cultivated plain before I came to the barren tablelands on which the great pyramids stand, at the fringe of the Libyan desert.

The nearer one comes to them, the smaller these great monsters seem. This is the result of perspective which is doubtless due to the fact that their breadth is equal to their height. However, when you reach their feet, and stand in the very shadow of these mountains made by men's hands, there is nothing for it but to admire and marvel. In order to reach the apex of the first pyramid, you have to climb a staircase of which each step is about a yard high.

A tribe of Arabs has taken upon itself the duty of protecting travellers, and acting as guides to those who wish to climb the principal pyramid. As soon as they see a stranger coming in the direction of their domain, they gallop to meet him, firing their pistols in the air to assure him that they are at his service, and ready to defend him against the attacks of any thievish Bedouins who might chance to come upon the scene.

To-day this suggestion makes travellers smile, for they have been reassured upon this point beforehand, but in the last century they really were held up by

## THE CLIMB

a band of pseudo-brigands, who, after frightening and robbing them, surrendered to the protecting tribe, which then expected a handsome reward for the perils and wounds encountered in what was only a pretended fight.

Four men were appointed to guide and support me during the climb. At first, I did not understand how it could be possible to climb steps of which the first alone came up as high as my chest. But, in a twinkling, two of the Arabs had jumped up on that gigantic ridge, and each had seized an arm. The other two pushed me under the shoulders, and all four, at each movement of this performance, chanted in unison the Arabic verse which ends with the ancient refrain: *Eleyson!*

In this way I counted two hundred and seven steps, and I hardly took more than a quarter of an hour to reach the platform. The moment the visitor stops to take breath, little girls, whose bodies are scarcely hidden by a blue shift, stand upon the step above his own and hold out at the level of his mouth little water jugs, whose ice-cold water cools him for an instant.

Nothing could seem more fantastic than these young Bedouin girls climbing about like monkeys with their little bare feet. They know every crack and cranny in the enormous stones. When you reach the top, you give them a backsheesh and a kiss, then you are lifted by the four Arabs and borne in triumph to the four points of the horizon. The flat platform on the top of this pyramid covers about a hundred square metres. Irregular blocks show that it has only been formed by the destruction of a point, doubtless like that of the second pyramid, which has been preserved intact, and may be seen a little distance away with its granite facing. The three pyramids, of Cheops, Chephren and

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Mycerinus, were all once adorned with that reddish envelope which was still to be seen in Herodotus's day. Little by little it has been stripped from them, as palaces needed to be built at Cairo for the caliphs and soldars.

From the top of this platform, the view, as you may imagine, is very fine. To the East, the Nile stretches from the end of the Delta to beyond Saccarah, where there are eleven pyramids smaller than those of Ghizeh. To the West, the range of the Libyan mountains forms what look like waves on the dusty horizon. The forest of palm-trees which occupies the place of the ancient Memphis stretches southwards like a green shadow. Cairo, upon the arid range of Mokatam, raises its domes and minarets at the entrance to the Syrian desert. All this is so well known that I need waste no time upon a description of it. But, when one sets bounds upon one's admiration, and looks at the stones which form the platform, there is something to be seen which may well compensate for any excess of enthusiasm. Every Englishman who has ventured upon this climb has, as a matter of course, inscribed his name upon the stones. Some have even thought fit to favour the public with their addresses, and a blacking merchant of Piccadilly has covered one whole block with an account of the merits of his invention, which are guaranteed by an "improved patent." Needless to remark, the *Crédeville voleur*, now so out of fashion, Bouginier's charge, and other eccentricities, planted there by our own artists on their travels, to provide a contrast to the monotony of glorious memories, are also to be seen.

## THE PLATFORM

### II

#### THE PLATFORM

I am afraid I must admit that Napoleon himself only saw the pyramids from the plain. Certainly, he would not have compromised his dignity by allowing himself to be hoisted in the arms of four Arabs, like a parcel passed from hand to hand, and he must have contented himself with answering by a salutation from below the *forty centuries* which, according to his calculations, looked down upon him at the head of our glorious army.

When I had gazed all round the surrounding landscape, and read attentively the modern inscriptions which are preparing tortures for the scholars of the future, I was preparing to go down again, when a fair gentleman, well built, with a high colour, and admirably gloved, scaled, as I had done a short time before, the last step of the quadruple staircase, and greeted me with a very stiff salute, which was due to me as the first comer. I took him for an English gentleman. He recognised me as a Frenchman without any hesitation.

I very quickly regretted that I had judged him so lightly. An Englishman would not have greeted me, seeing that upon the platform of the pyramid of Cheops there was no one present to introduce us to one another.

“Sir,” said the stranger to me with a slight German accent, “I am glad to find some civilised person here. I am an officer in the Guards of His Majesty the King of Prussia. I have obtained permission to join M. Lepsius’s expedition, and as that expedition spent some weeks here, I have to find out what I can by paying visits to everything it must have seen.” At

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the end of this speech, he gave me his card, with an invitation to go and see him if I should ever pass through Potsdam.

"You know," he added, seeing that I was about to go down again, "it is customary to take a collation here. These good fellows expect to share our modest provisions, and . . . if you feel like it, I shall be glad to offer you a share in a pie which one of my Arabs is carrying."

It does not take long for travellers to become acquainted, and, especially in Egypt at the top of the Great Pyramid, any European soon recognises another as a *Frank*, in other words as a compatriot. At such a distance, the map of our little Europe loses its colours. I except, however, the English, for they live upon an island apart.

The Prussian's conversation during the meal pleased me very much. He had letters with him which gave the latest news of M. Lepsius's expedition. At that moment it was exploring the neighbourhood of Lake Moeris and the subterranean cities of the old labyrinth. The Berlin scholars had discovered whole towns buried under the sands, built of brick, an underground Pompeii and Herculaneum which had never seen the light, which perhaps went back to the days of the Troglodytes. I could not help admitting that it was a noble ambition on the part of these learned Prussians to have followed in the footsteps of our own Institut d'Égypte, whose excellent work they could do no more than hope to complete.

This meal on the pyramid of Cheops is a matter of obligation for tourists, like that which is customary on the capital of Pompey's pillar at Alexandria. I was glad to have a learned and amiable companion to remind me of the fact. The little Bedouin girls had



## THE PLATFORM

kept enough water, in their jars of porous earth, to give us refreshment, and then to make grog with the help of a bottle of brandy which was carried by one of the Arabs in the Prussian's train.

However, the sun had become too hot for us to remain long on the platform. The pure, healthy air which one breathes at that height had allowed us to go some time without noticing the fact.

We decided then to leave the platform, and go into the pyramid itself through an entrance about a third of the way up. We were taken down a hundred and thirty steps by an inverse process to that which had brought us up. Two of the four Arabs held us by the shoulders from the top of each course, and delivered us into the outstretched arms of their companions below. There is a certain element of danger in this descent, and more than one traveller has broken his skull or his limbs in making it. However, we reached the entrance to the pyramid in safety.

It is a kind of grotto with marble walls, and a triangular vaulted roof, above which there is a broad stone which, in a French inscription, relates the arrival of our soldiers at this monument; it is the visiting card of the Army of Egypt, carved in a block of marble sixteen feet wide. I was reading it with due respect when the Prussian officer pointed out another inscription beneath it. This was in hieroglyphs, and, strangely enough, freshly carved.

He knew the meaning of these modern hieroglyphs, inscribed according to the system of Champollion. "It states," he said, "that the scientific expedition sent by the King of Prussia under the direction of Lepsius has visited the pyramids of Ghizeh, and hopes to solve with the same good fortune the other problems of its mission."

## THE PYRAMIDS

We had crossed the threshold, when twenty bearded Arabs, their girdles bristling with pistols and daggers, rose from the ground where they had just been taking a siesta. One of our guides, who seemed to be in charge, said:

"See how terrible they are. Look at their pistols and their muskets!"

"Do they mean to rob us?"

"On the contrary! They are here to defend you if the desert tribes should make an attack."

"But surely they don't exist any longer since Mohammed Ali came into power."

"Oh, there are still evil men, over there, behind the mountains. . . . However, for a *colonnate*, the brave fellows you see there will defend you against all attack."

The Prussian officer inspected their weapons, but did not appear to form a very high opinion of their powers of destruction. But it was only a question of five shillings or so for me, or a thaler and a half for the Prussian. We agreed, shared the expense, and told each other that we had not been swindled.

"It often happens," said the guide, "that hostile tribes make an incursion here, especially when they suspect the presence of rich strangers."

Certainly there is nothing impossible about it, and it would be a sad business to find oneself captured and imprisoned inside the Great Pyramid. The *colonnate* (Spanish piastre) which we gave our guards at least gave us the assurance that *they* could not, in fairness, play this trick on us.

But there was never any suggestion that these good fellows would have even dreamed of such a thing. The activity of their preparations; eight torches lighted in the twinkling of an eye; the charming

## THE PLATFORM

attention of providing us with little girls to go before and carry water for us—it was all most reassuring.

The first thing to do was to bend the head and the back, and set the feet cleverly in two marble grooves, one on either side of the way down. Between the two grooves, there is a kind of abyss as wide as the distance between the legs, and we had to be very careful not to fall into it. We went forward, step by step, placing our feet left and right as best we could, with a little assistance from the torchbearers, and so descended, bent almost double for about a hundred and fifty yards.

After that, there was no more danger of falling into the enormous fissure which we saw between our feet, and instead we had the discomfort of having to go on all fours through a passage partly obstructed by sand and ashes. The Arabs only clean this passage for a further *colonnade*, which is usually paid by rich and corpulent people.

After crawling on hands and knees for some time beneath this vault, we rose at the entrance to a new gallery which was hardly any higher than the one before it. After two hundred yards' more climbing, we came to a sort of cross-roads, with a deep dark well right in the middle, and this we had to go round to come to the staircase leading to the King's Chamber.

When we reached it, the Arabs fired their pistols and lighted branches to frighten away, they said, the bats and snakes. The chamber, with a shelving ridged roof, is seventeen feet long and sixteen wide.

On our way back from a voyage of discovery which had not proved very impressive, we had to rest at the entrance to the marble grotto, and we wondered what this strange passage along which we had come might have meant, with its marble rails, with an abyss between them, ending in a crossways, in the middle of which

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was that mysterious well of which we could not see the bottom.

The Prussian officer, ransacking his memory, gave me a reasonably logical explanation of its purpose. No one is so strong on the mysteries of antiquity as a German. According to his version, this was the purpose of the low, railed gallery which we had gone down and climbed again so painfully. The man who was to undergo the ordeal of initiation was seated in a chariot, which descended the steep slope by the force of gravity. When he reached the centre of the pyramid, the neophyte was received by priests who showed him the well and told him to cast himself into it. The neophyte, of course, hesitated, and this was regarded as a sign of prudence. Then he was brought a kind of helmet with a lighted lamp upon it, and with this he had to descend into the well, in which there were iron bars for him to set his feet upon.

Down and down he went, lighted to some extent by the lamp he carried on his head; then, about a hundred feet down, came to the entrance of a passage closed by a grating which immediately opened before him. Three men appeared at that instant, wearing bronze masks that represented the countenance of Anubis, the dog god. It was essential that he should not be disturbed by their threats, but should go forward and hurl them to the ground. Then on again for another league till he reached a place which seemed like a dark thick forest.

The moment he set foot in the principal avenue, the whole place blazed with light, producing an effect like that of a great fire. It was no more than fireworks and pitch burning in iron cages. The neophyte had to pass through the forest, though he might suffer a few burns, and usually succeeded in doing so.

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On the other side there was a river, and across this he had to swim. When he had hardly reached the middle, he was stopped and thrown back by a tremendous stirring of the water caused by two gigantic wheels. Just as his strength was on the point of giving out, there appeared before him an iron ladder which seemed to offer the only means of escape from a watery grave. But this was the third stage in the ordeal. As the neophyte placed a foot upon each rung, the one he had just left fell into the water. This nerve-racking situation was made still worse by a frightful wind which tossed about the ladder and the unfortunate man upon it. Just as his strength was really at an end, he was expected to have presence of mind enough to grasp two steel rings which came down to him, and by these he had to hang until he saw a door open, which by a supreme effort he succeeded in doing.

This was the last of the four elementary tests. The initiate then reached the temple, passed round the statue of Isis, and was welcomed and congratulated by the priests.

## III

### THE ORDEALS

With such memories as these we tried to repopulate this imposing solitude. The Arabs around us had gone to sleep again, waiting until the evening breeze had come to cool the air before they left the marble grotto, and we contributed different ideas of our own to the facts which tradition really confirmed. Those strange initiatory ceremonies, so often described by the Greek authors, who may, indeed, have seen them performed, were astonishingly interesting to us, for the

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stories fitted in perfectly with the arrangement of the place.

"How delightful it would be," I said to the German, "to have Mozart's *Magic Flute* performed here. Why does not some rich man take it into his head to have such a performance? At very little expense all these passages could be swept out, and all that would then be needed would be to bring out the Italian company from the Cairo theatre, with appropriate costumes. Imagine the thunderous voice of Zarastro resounding from the Hall of the Pharaohs, or the Queen of the Night appearing on the threshold of the room they call the Queen's Chamber, and sending forth those marvellous trills to peal through the darkness of the roof. Imagine the strains of the magic flute echoing through these long corridors, the grimaces and the fright of Papayeno, forced, as he followed in the footsteps of his master the initiate, to confront the threefold Anubis, then the blazing forest, the gloomy river stirred by the iron wheels, then that strange ladder of which, as he mounted, each step fell and dropped into the water with a sinister splash."

"It would be difficult," said the officer, "to do all that in the very heart of the pyramids. I told you that the initiate, when he left the well, went along a passage for about a league. That subterranean way took him at last to a temple at the gates of Memphis, whose site you saw from the top of the platform. But when, after successfully emerging from these first ordeals, he looked upon the light of day again, the statue of Isis was still veiled from him; there was a final trial for him to undergo, one of a purely moral kind, of which he had been given no warning, and the purpose of which he did not know. The priests had borne him along in triumph, as one who had become one of

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themselves; choirs and instruments had celebrated his victory. He had still to purify himself by a fast of forty-one days, before he might look upon the Great Goddess, the widow of Osiris. Each day, that fast came to an end at sunset, and he was allowed to renew his strength with a few ounces of bread and a little water from the Nile. During this long penance, the neophyte was allowed to converse, at certain hours, with the priests and priestesses whose whole life was spent in the subterranean cities. He had the right to question any of them, and observe the customs of this mystic people who had given up the external world, and whose great numbers astounded Semiramis the Victorious, who, when she was laying the foundations of the Egyptian Babylon (the old Cairo), witnessed the collapse of the roof of one of these cities of the dead which were still inhabited by the living."

"And what happened to the initiate after his forty-one day fast?"

"There were still eighteen days of retreat in which he had to maintain complete silence. He was allowed only to read and write. Then he was put through an examination in which all the actions of his life were analysed and criticised. This lasted for another twelve days; then he was made to sleep for nine more days behind the statue of Isis, after he had implored the goddess to appear to him and inspire him with wisdom in his dreams. At last, after about three months, the trials were completed. The neophyte's aspiration towards divinity, encouraged by his reading, instruction and fasting, aroused in him such a pitch of religious enthusiasm that he was at last worthy to see the sacred veils of the goddess fall before him. Then, his astonishment reached its height as he saw that cold statue come to life, and its features suddenly

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take the form of those of the woman he loved the most, or the ideal which he had formed for himself of the most perfect beauty.

"The moment he stretched out his arms to take her, she vanished in a cloud of perfume. The priests entered with great ceremony and the initiate was proclaimed like unto the gods. Then, taking his place at the banquet of the Sages, he was allowed to taste the most delicate food, and intoxicate himself with the earthly ambrosia, which was never lacking at these feasts. He had but one regret, that he had had but one instant to admire the divine apparition which had deigned to smile upon him. But this he was to enjoy in his dreams. A long sleep, doubtless induced by the lotus juice which had been pressed into his cup during the feast, enabled the priests to carry him to some leagues from Memphis, to the shores of that famous lake which still bears the name Karoun (Caron). There, still asleep, he was set upon a small boat and taken to the province of Fayoum, a delightful oasis, which, even to this day, is the country of roses. There was a deep valley, partly surrounded by mountains, and partly cut off from the rest of the world by precipices made by men's hands. Here the priests had brought together all the wealth of nature. Trees from India and the Yemen mingled their lush foliage and their strange blossoms with the richest vegetation of the land of Egypt.

"Tame animals supplied the element of life in this wonderful scene, and the initiate, set down asleep upon the turf, found himself at his awakening in a world which seemed the very perfection of created nature. He rose, and breathed the pure morning air, born again in the warmth of the sun which for so long he had not seen. He heard the cadenced song



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of the birds, admired the perfumed blossoms, the calm surface of waters bordered by papyrus and starred with red lotuses, with the pink flamingo and the ibis bending gracefully at their edge. But there was still something lacking to make this solitude live. A woman, an innocent virgin, so young that she seemed to spring from the pure dream of a morning, so beautiful that when he looked more closely upon her, he thought he recognised the glorious features of Isis, glimpsed as through a cloud. Such was the divine creature who was to be the mate and the reward of the triumphant initiate."

Here I thought fit to interrupt the vivid story of the Berlin scholar.

"It seems to me," I said, "that what you are telling me is the story of Adam and Eve."

"Practically," said he.

In fact, this last ordeal, delightful and unexpected, in the initiation of the Egyptians, was the same that Moses has told in Genesis. In that marvellous garden there was a certain tree whose fruits were forbidden to the neophyte who had been allowed to enter Paradise. Undoubtedly this last victory over self was that part of the initiation, which has been discovered in Egyptian bas-reliefs four thousand years old, which represent a man and a woman, under a tree, with the woman offering the fruit to the companion of her solitude. Around the tree is coiled a serpent, the representation of Typhon, the god of evil. And, in fact, it usually happened that the neophyte, though he had overcome every material danger, yielded to this temptation, and so came to be shut out for ever from the earthly paradise. It was then his punishment to wander through the world, spreading among foreign peoples the teaching which he had received from the priests.

## THE PYRAMIDS

If, on the other hand, he resisted—a very rare occurrence—he became the equal of a king. He was borne in triumph through the streets of Memphis and his person became sacred.

It was because of his failure to withstand this ordeal that Moses was deprived of the honours he expected. Offended at this result, he engaged in open warfare with the Egyptian priests, contended with them in science and in miracles, and finally set his people free by means of a plot, the result of which is common knowledge.

The Prussian who told me all this was evidently a disciple of Voltaire . . . he took the same point of view in matters of religion as the sceptic Frederick II. I could not refrain from saying so.

“You are mistaken,” said he; “we Protestants analyse everything, but we are none the less religious on that account. If it seems to be clear that the idea of the Earthly Paradise, the apple, and the serpent, was known to the ancient Egyptians, that is in no respect a proof that the tradition is not of divine origin. I am inclined to believe that this last ordeal in the mysteries was only a mystical representation of the scene which must have taken place in the earliest days of the world. Whether Moses learned it from the Egyptians who held the key to primitive wisdom, or whether, when he was writing Genesis, he made use of experiences through which he had himself passed, with which he was personally acquainted, is in no way material to the real issue. Triptolemes, Orpheus and Pythagoras also went through the same ordeals. One founded the mysteries of Eleusis; the other, those of the Cabires of Samothrace; and the third, the mystical associations of the Lebanon.”

“Orpheus had even less success than Moses; he

## THE ORDEALS

failed in the fourth test, when he should have had the presence of mind to grasp the rings suspended above him as the iron rungs began to give way beneath his feet. He fell into the water, and was pulled out of it with difficulty; instead of reaching the temple, he had to turn back and climb up again to the entrance to the pyramids. During the ordeal, his wife had been removed for him by one of those natural accidents which priests are so clever at producing. Thanks to his talents and renown, he was given the chance to try a second time, but again he failed. So Eurydice was lost for ever, and he was left to weep for her in exile."

"In that way," said I, "it is possible to explain away all religions. But what should we gain by it?"

"Nothing. We have just spent a couple of hours talking over origins and points of history. Now it will soon be evening, and we must find a place for the night."

We passed the night in an Italian *locanda*, not far away, and the next day were taken to the site of Memphis, which is two leagues to the south. The ruins are hard to trace, and everything is covered by a forest of palm-trees. In the midst of these trees one suddenly comes upon the huge statue of Sesostris, sixty feet high, but lying full length upon the sand. Shall I speak of Saccarah, which is reached soon after, and its pyramids, smaller than those of Ghizeh, among which is the great pyramid of brick made by the Hebrews? Of greater interest are the interiors of the animals' tombs, and of these there are a great number in the plain. There are tombs for cats, for crocodiles, and for ibises. It is difficult to get into them, and one must breathe ashes and dust, and sometimes drag oneself along on hands and knees through

## THE PYRAMIDS

passages which can be traversed no other way. Then the traveller finds himself in the middle of vast underground halls where all those animals which the Egyptians took the trouble to embalm and bury, just as if they had been men, are piled in millions and arranged in order. Each mummy of a cat is wrapped in yards and yards of bandages on which, from one end to the other, are inscribed in hieroglyphics, probably the life and virtues of the animal. So with the crocodiles. As for the ibises, their remains are enclosed in earthen vessels, which also stretch for incalculable distances, like pots of jam in a country larder.

I had no difficulty in fulfilling the commission the Consul had entrusted to me, and then I took leave of the Prussian officer. He went his way towards Upper Egypt, while I returned to Cairo, going down the Nile by boat.

I hastened to take to the Consulate the ibis I had secured after so much trouble, but I was told that during the three days my journey had taken, our poor Consul had felt that he was getting worse, and had taken ship for Alexandria.

I learned afterwards that he had died in Spain.

## IV

### DEPARTURE

It was with regret that I left this old city of Cairo, where I found the last traces of Arab genius. It did not give the lie to the ideas that I had formed of it from the stories and traditions of the Orient. I had seen it so many times in the dreams of my youth, that it seemed to me that once, at some uncertain time, I

## DEPARTURE

had stayed there before, and I was able to reconstruct the old Cairo among the deserted quarters and crumbling mosques. It seemed to me that I was treading again in the footprints I had made before, and as I went along I used to say to myself: "When I get past this wall, or when I go through this gate, I shall see such a thing . . ." and there the thing was, ruined but real.

Let us think no more of it. That Cairo lies beneath ashes and dust; the spirit and the progress of modern life have triumphed over it like death. In a few more months, the European streets will have cut right through the old dumb dusty city which now crumbles peacefully upon the fellahs who live in it. It is the quarter of the Franks, the town of the Italians, Provençaux, and Maltese, the future emporium of British India, which is flourishing, glittering, and growing. The Orient of former days is wearing out its old costumes, its old palaces, its old customs, but it is in its last days; it can say as one of its sultans said: "Destiny has shot her bolt: I am done; my day is over." What the desert still protects, as little by little it disappears in the sand, is outside the walls of Cairo; the city of the tombs, the valley of the Caliphs, which seems, like Herculaneum, to have sheltered vanished generations, whose palaces, arcades, and columns, whose precious marbles, painted and gilded rooms, walls, domes and minarets, in mad multiplication, have had no other purpose than to cover coffins. This worship of the dead is eternally characteristic of Egypt; at least it serves to protect and hand on to the world the glorious history of her past.

## PART V

### THE CANGE

#### I

#### PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

THE *cange* which carried me to Damietta contained also the belongings I had gathered during my eight months' stay at Cairo—to wit, the slave with the golden complexion sold to me by Abd-el-Kerim; the green chest that contained the property which he had left her; another chest filled with what I myself had added; still another, containing my European clothes, my last resort should evil fortune overtake me, like that shepherd's garment which some emperor kept to remind him of his former life; and all the utensils and bits of furniture which had been needed to furnish my house in the Coptic quarter, water jars and vessels for cooling water, pipes and narghiles, cotton mattresses and baskets of palm which served in turn as divans, beds and tables, and had the further advantage on a journey of being able to contain the various specimens of poultry from the backyard and the dovecot.

Before leaving, I went to say good-bye to Madame Bonhomme—the fair, delightful Providence of the traveller. “Alas,” said I, “for a long time I shall see no faces that are not coloured. I go to brave the plague that rages in the Egyptian delta, and storms in the Syrian Gulf which I shall have to cross in some

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

frail barque; and the sight of her may be the last smile my country has to give me."

Madame Bonhomme belongs to that type of southern beauty which Gozzi made famous in his Venetian women, and which Petrarch acclaimed in our own Provençal women. It appears that these charming anomalies owe the gold of their hair to the nearness of the Alps, while their black eyes have borrowed their fire from the warmth of Mediterranean shores. Their colouring, clear and delicate like the rosy satin of Flemish women, is coloured in those parts which the sun has touched, with a vague amber shade reminiscent of autumn leaves when the white grape half veils itself beneath the reddish branches. Oh faces, so beloved by Titian and Giorgione, must my regrets be based upon a memory of one I saw upon the Nile? Yet, I had with me another woman with hair as black as ebony, a face that might have been carved in portor marble, and beauty as severe and stern as that of an ancient Asian goddess, whose very grace, with its strange compound of savagery and servility, sometimes reminded me, if I may use the expression, of the serious gaiety of a captive animal.

Madame Bonhomme took me into her shop, which was filled with the sort of things which travellers need, and I listened with admiration to her account of the merits of all those delightful objects which enable the English, even in the desert, to assure themselves all the comfort of fashionable life. In her soft Provençal accent she explained to me how one might set up at the foot of a palm-tree or an obelisk, quarters complete for masters and servants, with furniture and kitchen, all borne on camel-back; give European dinners perfect in every respect, with sauces and fresh vegetables, with the help of those boxes of preserved food-

## THE CANGE

stuffs which, I must admit, are often extremely useful.

"Alas," I said to her, "I am become quite a *Bedaoui* (nomad). I live very well on doura cooked upon a sheet of iron, on dates fried in butter, apricot paste, and smoked grasshoppers, and I know a way of cooking a fowl in the desert without even the trouble of plucking it."

"I do not know this delicacy," said Madame Bonhomme.

"This," said I, "is the recipe, as it was given to me by an ingenious scoundrel who saw it done in the Hedjaz. You take a fowl . . ."

"So you need a fowl?" said Madame Bonhomme.

"Certainly, just as you need a hare for jugged hare."

"Then?"

"Then you light a fire between two stones, get some water . . ."

"That is a fair number of things already!"

"Nature provides them. If you had only sea-water, it would be just as good, and you would need no salt."

"And in what do you put the fowl?"

"Ah, that is the cleverest part of the whole business. You pour water into the desert sand—another ingredient provided by nature. So is produced a fine, clean clay, which proves extremely useful."

"You would eat a fowl cooked in sand?"

"One last word! Out of this clay you make a thick ball, and into it you put the same or any other bird."

"It becomes interesting."

"You set the ball of earth upon the fire, and turn it from time to time. When the crust is hard enough,



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and well coloured everywhere, the ball can be taken from the fire, the bird is cooked."

"And is that all?"

"Not quite. The ball which has now become terra-cotta is broken open, and the feathers which have been caught in the clay come away with the fragments of the improvised pot."

"But that is a banquet for a savage!"

"Not at all, it is simply stewed fowl."

Madame Bonhomme realised that there was nothing to be done with so consummate a traveller, so she put back all the tin stoves and tents, the cushions and indiarubber beds, marked "Improved Patent" in English.

"I should like to find something," I said, "that might be useful to me."

"Wait," said Madame Bonhomme, "I am sure you have forgotten to buy a flag. You must have a flag."

"But I am not going to war."

"You are going down the Nile, and you need a tricolour for your boat so that the fellahs will respect you."

She pointed out to me, along the walls of the shop, a whole range of the flags of all navies.

I was already taking down the staff with a gilded top whence our colours hung, when Madame Bonhomme stopped me.

"You can take your choice: you are under no obligation to indicate your nationality. Usually gentlemen take an English flag, and so have greater security."

"Madame," said I, "I am not one of those 'gentlemen.'"

"So I imagined," said she with a smile.

I like to think that they are not the best people

## THE CANGE

of Paris who fly the English colours on that same Nile wherein the flag of the Republic has been reflected. Legitimists on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem certainly choose the flag of Sardinia, but there is no harm in that.

### II

#### A FAMILY CELEBRATION

We set out from the port of Boulaq. The palace of a Mameluke bey, now the polytechnic school; the white mosque which stands beside it; the potters' stalls along the banks where are sold the large vessels of porous earth made at Thebes which come down by boat from the Upper Nile; the shipyards on the right bank of the river . . . all disappeared in a few minutes. We tacked towards a little island formed by the mud between Boulaq and Embabeh, and soon our prow ran upon its sandy shore. The two lateen sails shivered, but they did not take the wind. "*Battal! Battal!*" cried the *reïs*, "Bad! Bad!" Presumably he referred to the wind. The rust-coloured water, stirred by a contrary breeze, cast its spray in our faces, and the reflection of the sky made the water at our wake seem the colour of slate.

The boatmen got out to free the cange and turn it round. Then there began one of those chantey with which Egyptian sailors always accompany their work: they invariably end in *eleyson*. While five or six lads, stripped in a moment of their blue tunics, and looking like statues of Florentine bronze, devoted themselves to their task, up to their knees in the mud, the *reïs* sat upon the prow like a pasha, and calmly smoked his narghile. A quarter of an hour later, we

## A FAMILY CELEBRATION

were going back to Boulaq, half awash, with the tips of our yards dipping in the water.

We had hardly made a hundred yards against the current. Again the boat had to be turned—this time it was caught in the reeds—and again we ran upon the sandbank. “*Battal! Battal!*” the *reïs* continued to say from time to time.

On my right I recognised the gardens of the pleasant villas which are along the avenue of Choubrah; the monstrous sycamores were noisy with the sharp chatter of crows, sometimes interrupted by the sinister cry of a kite.

For the rest, not a lotus, not an ibis, none of the old local colour; only, here and there, a buffalo standing in the water, and Pharaoh’s cocks, a kind of small pheasant with golden feathers, flying above the orange-groves and banana-palms in the gardens.

I was forgetting the obelisk of Heliopolis, which with its stone finger points the limit of the Syrian desert. Unfortunately I had never seen it except from a distance. All day long that monument was to remain in sight, for the cange continued to sail in zigzags.

When night fell, the orb of the sun went down behind the regular line of the Libyan mountains, and suddenly nature passed from the violet shade of dusk to the bluish darkness of the night. Far away, at some café, I could see the lights swimming in their bowls of transparent oil, and hear the harsh strains of the *naz* and the *rehab* accompanying that well-known Egyptian melody: *Ya teyly!* (Oh Nights!)

Other voices sang the response to the first verses: “Oh Nights of Joy!” The song told of the happiness of friends who are like to one another; of love and of desire, the divine flames that radiate from that *pure*

## THE CANGE

*brightness* which exists in heaven alone. It invoked *Abmad*, the elect, the chief of the Apostles, and a chorus of children's voices took up the antistrophe of that delicious, sensual effusion which calls down the blessing of the Lord upon the joys of night upon earth.

I realised that some family celebration was in progress. The strange clucking of the fellah women succeeded the choir of children, and the occasion might as easily be a death as a marriage, for, in all the ceremonies of the Egyptians we find that mingling of plaintive joy or a plaint interrupted by transports of joy which, in the ancient world, presided over all the actions of their lives.

The *reïs* had moored our boat to a pile planted in the sand, and was preparing to go ashore. I asked him if we were only stopping for a while at the village in front of us, but he said we should spend the night there, and even the next day until three o'clock, when the south-west wind would get up (it was the monsoon time).

"I thought," I said, "that when the wind was not favourable, the boat was to be towed."

"It was not in our contract," he replied.

Before leaving, we had indeed made an agreement in writing before the *cadi*, but obviously they had put into it whatever they thought fit. But I am never in a hurry to reach anywhere, and this circumstance, which would have made an English traveller writhe with indignation, only provided me with an opportunity to make a better study of the old channel, now so little used, which the Nile takes from Cairo to Damietta.

The *reïs*, who expected violent storms of complaint, admired my calmness. To tow a boat is relatively expensive, for besides requiring a greater number of sailors on board, it calls for relays from village to village.

## A FAMILY CELEBRATION

A cange has two rooms, charmingly painted and gilded inside, with screened windows looking out upon the river, and forming a pleasant frame for the landscape upon the shores. Baskets of flowers and complicated arabesques adorn the panels: two wooden chests stand one on either side of each room. In the daytime one sits, cross-legged, upon them, and at night they are spread with rugs and cushions. Usually, the first room serves as a divan, the second as a harem. The whole can be hermetically sealed and bolted, except for the rats, whose society has to be endured whatever steps one takes to avoid it. Mosquitoes and other insects are even less agreeable companions, but by night their perfidious embraces may be avoided by means of a vast shirt which one gets into, as though it were a sack, tying up the opening afterwards. This surrounds the head with a double veil of gauze, underneath which one breathes quite well.

It looked as though we should have to pass the night on the boat, and I was already preparing to do so, when the *reis*, who had gone ashore, called upon me with some ceremony, and invited me to go with him. I had some scruples about leaving the slave alone in the cabin; and he himself told me that it would be better to take her with us.

### III

#### THE MUTAHIR

When we reached the bank, I saw that we had simply disembarked at Choubrah. The Pasha's gardens, with the bowers of myrtle which adorn their entrance, lay before us; to our left, on both sides of the avenue,

## THE CANGE

were a number of poor houses built of unbaked brick: the café I had noticed stood beside the river, and the neighbouring house was that of the *reïs* himself, who invited us to go in.

A nice thing! I thought, to spend all day upon the Nile, and at the end to find ourselves only a league from Cairo. I felt that I should like to return there for the evening, and spend it in reading the newspapers at Madame Bonhomme's, but the *reïs* had already brought us to his house, and it was obvious that some celebration was going on at which we should assist.

In fact, the songs which we had heard, actually came from this house; a host of dark-hued folk, among whom were several pure-blooded negroes, seemed to be giving themselves up to joy. The *reïs*, whose Frankish dialect, flavoured with Arabic, I understood only imperfectly, finally made me understand that this was a family feast in honour of his son's circumcision. Then I realised why it was we had made so little progress.

The actual ceremony had taken place at the mosque the evening before, and this was the second day of the rejoicings. The family feasts of even the poorest Egyptian families are public affairs, and the avenue was full of people: about thirty children, schoolfellows of the newly circumcised (*mutabir*), filled one room; the women, relations or friends of our *reïs's* wife, formed a circle in a back room, and we stayed near the door. The *reïs* indicated a place near his wife to my slave, who went without any hesitation to sit down upon the *khanoum's* carpet, after making the proper salutations.

They distributed coffee and pipes, and some Nubian women began to dance to the sound of the *tarabouks* (terra-cotta drums), which several women were holding

## THE MUTAHIR

in one hand and beating with the other. The *reïs's* family was doubtless too poor to engage white *almées*; but they had Nubians to dance for their amusement. The *loti*, or coryphee, performed the customary clownish tricks as he directed the steps of four women who were performing that wild saltarelle which I have already described. It varies only in the amount of fire which the executants put into it.

During one of the intervals between the music and dancing, the *reïs* had made me sit near an old man who, he said, was his father. This excellent old gentleman, on being told my nationality, welcomed me with an essentially French oath, which his pronunciation transformed most comically. It was all he remembered of the language of the conquerors of '98. I answered by crying "Napoleon!" He did not seem to understand. That astonished me; but soon I remembered that this name dated from the Empire. "Did you know Bonaparte?" I asked him in Arabic. He threw back his head in a kind of solemn reverie, and began to sing at the top of his voice:

*Ya salam, Bounabarte!*  
Hail to thee! O Bonaparte!

I could not prevent myself from bursting into tears when I heard that old man repeat the song of the Egyptians in honour of him they called the sultan Kébir. I urged him to sing it all through, but his memory had only retained a few of its verses.

"Thy absence has made us sigh, oh general who takest sugar with thy coffee! Oh delightful general whose cheeks are so agreeable, thou whose sword has smitten the Turks! Hail to thee!

"Oh thou of the beautiful hair! From the day when thou didst enter Cairo, that city has shone with a light like unto that from a crystal lamp: Hail to thee!"

## THE CANGE

But the *reïs*, who cared little for these memories, had gone to the children's side, where it seemed that preparations were being made for a new ceremony.

The children quickly ranged themselves in two ranks, and the other people present in the house rose, for now the boy, who the evening before had been taken in procession to Cairo, was to be escorted solemnly through the village. A richly harnessed horse was brought, and the little fellow, who might have been seven years old, dressed in the clothes and ornaments of a woman (probably all borrowed), was hoisted onto the saddle, and two of his relations held him there, one on either side. He was as proud as an emperor, and, as is the custom, held a handkerchief over his mouth. I did not dare to look at him too attentively, knowing that Orientals fear the evil eye, but I watched carefully all the details of the procession, which I had not been able to see so well at Cairo, where these processions of *mutahirs* are very little different from those of marriages.

At this one there were no naked clowns pretending to fight with shields and lances; but a few Nubians, mounted on stilts, chased one another with long staves. This was to attract the crowd. Then came the children, dressed in their best clothes, under the direction of five or six fakirs or santons, singing religious *moals*. Then the child on horseback, with his relatives around him, and finally the women of the family, among whom walked the unveiled dancing women, who renewed their voluptuous gesticulating every time the procession came to a halt. The bearers of perfumed water pots had not been forgotten, nor the children who shook the *kumkum*, flagons of rose water from which they sprinkled the spectators. But the most important person in the procession was undoubtedly the barber, who carried in his hand the



## THE MUTAHIR

mysterious instrument (whose closer acquaintance the poor child was destined to make later), whilst his assistant dangled at the end of a lance, a kind of sign with the emblems of his trade. Before the *mutahir* walked one of his school friends, wearing round his neck the *writing tablet*, decorated by the master with masterpieces of calligraphy. Behind the horse a woman cast salt to drive away evil spirits. The procession ended with those hired women who weep at funerals and accompany the ceremonies of marriage and circumcision with the same *olouloulou*, the tradition of which goes to the remotest antiquity.

While the procession was going through the few streets of the little village of Choubrah, I stayed with the *mutahir's* grandfather, after having all the trouble in the world in preventing the slave from going with the other women. I had to use the word "*Mafisch*" (which is almighty in Egypt), to forbid her from what she regarded as a duty both of politeness and religion. The negroes were setting tables and decorating the room with leaves. Meanwhile, I tried to awaken memories in the old man by shouting into his ears, with the little Arabic at my disposal, the glorious names of Kléber and Menou. He only remembered Barthélemy, the former chief of police at Cairo, who was famous among the people because of his height and the magnificent costume he used to wear. Barthélemy inspired love songs which are still remembered, and not by women alone.

"My well-beloved is wearing a broidered hat; knots and rosettes adorn his girdle.

"I wished to embrace him, but he bade me: *Aspetta* (wait)! Oh, how sweet is the Italian tongue he speaks! God keep him whose eyes are like the eyes of a gazelle!

"How handsome thou art, Fart-el-Roumy (Barthélemy) when thou proclaimest peace to all the world, with a firman in thy hand!"

## THE CANGE

### IV

#### THE SIRAFEH

When the *mutabir* came back again, all the children came and sat down four by four at round tables, where the schoolmaster, the barber and the santons had the places of honour. The other grown-up persons waited until the end of this repast before they had their part. The Nubians sat down at the door and received the remains of the dishes, the last scraps of which they distributed to the poor who had been attracted by the noise of the feast. After having passed through two or three series of guests of lower rank, the bones reached a final circle of stray dogs which had been attracted by the odour of flesh. In these patriarchal feasts nothing is lost. However poor the host, every living creature may claim his share in the feast. Well-to-do people, indeed, are accustomed to pay for their share by giving little presents, which lighten to some extent the burden which, on these occasions, weighs heavily upon the poorer families.

But the moment—a painful one for the *mutabir*—was approaching which would bring the feast to an end. The children were again made to rise, and they alone entered the room where the women were. They sang: “Oh thou, his paternal aunt! Oh thou, his maternal aunt! Come and prepare his *sirafeh*!” Thereafter I learned the details of what happened from my slave, who assisted at the ceremony of the *sirafeh*.

The women gave the children a shawl, and four of them held it by the corners. The writing tablet was put in the middle, and the leader of the school (*arif*)

## THE SIRAFEH

began to intone a song of which each verse was then repeated as a chorus by the children and the women. A prayer was addressed to God the Omniscient, "who knoweth the footsteps of the black ant, and his work in the darkness," to grant his blessing to this child, who could already read and understand the Koran. In his name, thanks were given to the father who had paid for his schooling, and the mother, who had taught him how to speak ever since his cradle.

"God grant me," said the child to his mother, "that I may see thee seated in paradise, greeted by Maryam (Mary), by Zeynab, daughter of Ali, and by Fatima, daughter of the Prophet!"

The rest of the verses sang the praises of the fakirs and the schoolmaster, who had explained and taught the child the different chapters of the Koran.

Other songs which were not so serious followed these litanies.

"Oh you, young girls who surround us," said the *arif*, "I commend you to God's care, when you paint your eyes and look at yourselves in the mirror.

"And you, married women here assembled, by the virtue of Chapter 37: *Fecundity*, be blessed! And if there are women here grown old in celibacy, let them be driven out with kicks!"

During this ceremony, the boys took the *sirafeh* round the room, and each woman gave a small gift, and put it on the tablet; after which the money was poured into a handkerchief and the children gave it to the fakirs.

Coming back to the men's room, the *mutahir* was placed upon a raised seat. The barber and his assistant stood on either side with their instruments. Before the child was placed a copper bowl, and everyone came to put his offering into it, after which he was taken by the barber into a separate room, where the operation

## THE CANGE

was performed in the presence of both his parents, while cymbals were sounded to drown his complaints.

The assembly, without troubling about this part of the performance, went on to pass the greater part of the night in drinking sherbet, coffee and a sort of thick beer (*bouza*), an intoxicating drink, principally used by the blacks, which is doubtless the same as that which Herodotus calls barley wine.

## V

### THE FOREST OF STONE

I did not know how to spend my time the next morning until the time when the wind was due to rise. The *reis* and all his people gave themselves up to slumber with that profound lack of care for broad daylight which northern peoples can hardly understand. I decided to leave the slave all day in the cange, and take a walk as far as Heliopolis. It was hardly a league distant.

Suddenly I remembered a promise I had made to a good ship's purser who had lent me his carabine during the crossing from Syra to Alexandria. When I had thanked him on our arrival, he said: "There is only one thing I would ask of you. Get me a few fragments of that petrified forest which is in the desert a little way from Cairo. When you pass through Smyrna, you can leave them with Madame Carton, rue des Roses."

Among travellers, commissions of this sort are sacred, and my shame at having forgotten this one made me decide immediately upon this simple expedition. Moreover, I, too, was anxious to see this forest whose

## THE FOREST OF STONE

origin I did not understand. I woke up the slave. She was in a very bad temper, and asked to stay with the *reïs's* wife. Then I thought of taking the *reïs*, but a little reflection and the experience I had acquired of the morals of the country proved to me that in this honourable family the innocence of my poor Zeynab would run no risks.

After making the necessary arrangements, and warning the *reïs* who secured an intelligent donkeyman for me, I set out for Heliopolis, leaving Adrian's canal on the left, a canal which formerly went from the Nile to the Red Sea, by whose dry bed we were to find our way through the sand-dunes.

The land around Choubrah is in an excellent state of cultivation. After a wood of sycamores which surrounds the stud farm, we left upon one hand a number of gardens in which the orange-tree is cultivated between date-palms planted in regular rows; then, crossing a branch of the *Calish*, or Cairo canal, came in a short time to the fringe of the desert, which begins where the Nile flood region ends. There the fertile chequered area of the plains, carefully watered by the irrigating trenches which get their water from the *saquiés*, or well wheels, comes to an end. There, that strange suburb of sepulchres which goes as far as Mokatam, and in this part is called the *Valley of the Caliphs*, begins. It seems to suggest that sadness and death have conquered even nature. Here Touloun and Bibars, Saladin and Malek-Adel, and a thousand other heroes of Islam, lie, not in simple tombs, but in huge palaces still glorious with arabesques and gildings, with great mosques here and there among them. It looks as though the spectres who dwell in these huge places still wished for places of prayer and of assembly, for, on certain days, if tradition is to be believed,

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these halls are filled by a strange host of figures of the past.

Leaving this mournful city which, in outward appearance, resembles one of the flourishing quarters of Cairo, we came to the dyke of Heliopolis, which was built to protect the town from the worst floods. The whole plain on the other side is studded with little hillocks formed of masses of ruins. Most of them are the ruins of a village, and under them are hidden the lost remains of even earlier buildings. Nothing has remained standing; not a single stone of the period of antiquity rises above the soil, except the obelisk, and round that a large garden has been planted.

The obelisk is at the centre of four avenues of ebony-trees: wild bees have made their hives in the cracks of one of the sides which is defaced. The gardener, who is not unused to the visits of travellers, offered me flowers and fruits. I sat down and dreamed for a moment of the splendours which Strabo describes, the three other obelisks of the Temple of the Sun, of which two are at Rome while the other has been destroyed; of those avenues of yellow marble sphinxes whereof one only was still to be seen in the last century; and finally, of that town, the cradle of the sciences, where Herodotus and Plato came to seek initiation into the mysteries. Heliopolis has biblical memories also. It was there that Joseph gave that beautiful example of chastity which in our day is welcomed only with an ironical smile. The Arabs have an entirely different version of this legend. According to them, Joseph and Zuleïka are the types of pure love, of the victory of duty over the senses, who triumphed over a dual temptation, for Joseph's master was one of Pharaoh's eunuchs. In the original legend, which the poets of the Orient have often taken as their theme, the tender

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Zuleïka was not sacrificed as in the one we know. At first condemned by the women of Memphis, her innocence was admitted by everybody when Joseph, after coming out of prison, made Pharaoh's court render justice to her exquisite beauty.

The sentiment of platonic love with which the Arab poets presume Joseph to have been animated for Zuleïka, which certainly renders his sacrifice the more beautiful, did not prevent that patriarch from later marrying the daughter of a priest of Heliopolis called Azima. A little more to the North he established a family at a place called Gessen, where, in our own times, it is believed the remains of a Jewish temple built by Onias have been discovered.

I had not time to visit this cradle of the posterity of Jacob, but I shall not let this opportunity pass without absolving that people, whose patriarchal traditions we have accepted, for a seemingly disloyal act for which philosophers have reproached it with some severity. One day at Cairo I was speaking to a *humourist* from Berlin, who was one of the experts in M. Lepsius's expedition, about the flight of God's chosen people from Egypt.

"Do you believe," he said, "that so many excellent Hebrews would have been ill-bred enough to *borrow* in such a way the table-service of people who, though Egyptians, had obviously been their friends or neighbours?"

"Well," said I, "one must either believe that, or deny the veracity of the Scriptures."

"There may be an error in the version, or an interpolation in the text; but listen to what I am going to tell you. All through the ages the Hebrews have had a genius for banking and discounting. In those simple days, money can only have been lent on the security

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of a pledge . . . and you may be quite sure that such lending was their principal industry."

"But the historians depict them as busied in making bricks for the pyramids (though, it is true, the pyramids are built of stone), and the only return they got for their labours took the form of onions and other vegetables."

"Well, you may be sure that if they got hold of a few onions, they knew how to make the best of them, and that those onions were quickly multiplied."

"What about it?"

"Nothing, except that the plate which they carried off was probably a pledge for the loans they had made to the inhabitants of Memphis. The Egyptian is a careless fellow; he had doubtless allowed interest and charges to accumulate, all at the legal rate, of course."

"So there was not a *boni* to come to him?"

"I am sure of it. The Hebrews only took away what had accrued to them by all the laws of natural and commercial equity. By that action, which was undoubtedly legitimate, they founded for ever afterwards the true principles of the credit system. Besides, the Talmud says in definite terms: "They only took with them what was their own."

I give this German paradox for what it is worth. I was anxious to find those more important relics of the Bible which are not far from Heliopolis. The gardener who looks after the last of the monuments of this illustrious city, originally called *Ainschems*, or the Eye of the Sun, gave me one of his fellahs to take me to Matarea. After a few minutes' walking through the dust, I came upon a new oasis, a wood of sycamores and orange-trees, with a spring at the entrance to the enclosure, the only soft water spring, I was told, which the nitrous Egyptian earth allows to filter through it.



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The inhabitants attribute this quality to the blessing of God. During the stay of the Holy Family at Matarea, the Virgin, it is said, came there to wash the linen of the Infant Jesus. It is also said that this water cures leprosy. Poor women who post themselves beside the spring offer you a cup of it for a small backsheesh.

In the wood there is also to be seen the bushy sycamore under which the Holy Family took refuge when it was pursued by the band of a brigand called Disma. He, who later became the penitent thief, finally caught up with the fugitives, but suddenly his heart was touched by faith, so that he offered hospitality to Joseph and Mary in one of his houses on the site of old Cairo, which was then called Babylon in Egypt. This Disma, whose occupation appears to have been lucrative, had property everywhere. I had already been shown in Cairo, in a Coptic monastery, an old cellar with a vaulted roof which is supposed to be a remnant of Disma's hospitable house, and the very place where the Holy Family rested.

That is the Coptic tradition, but the marvellous tree of Matarea receives the adherence of all other Christian communities. Without agreeing that this sycamore goes back to an antiquity so remote as is alleged, one may admit that it is the offspring of some seed from the ancient tree, and for centuries nobody has visited it without taking away a fragment of the wood or of the bark. But it is still of enormous dimensions, and looks like a baobab-tree. Its huge mass of branches and off-shoots is hidden under the *ex-voto*, the rosaries, inscriptions and sacred pictures which have been hung upon it or nailed to it everywhere.

When we left Matarea, we quickly came upon the

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traces of Adrian's canal again. It serves as a road for some way, and the iron wheels of the carriages from Suez have left deep ruts in it. The desert is by no means so dry as people believe; tufts of balsamic plants, mosses, lichens and cacti cover the ground nearly everywhere, and great rocks, almost hidden by scrub, stand out upon the horizon.

The Mokatam range turns off towards the south; the defile, growing narrower, soon hid it from sight, and my guide pointed with his finger to the strange composition of the rocks which rose above the road. They were simply masses of oysters and shell-fish of all kinds. The Flood, or perhaps nothing more than the Mediterranean Sea which, according to scientists, formerly covered the whole valley of the Nile, has left these incontestable traces. What stranger thing than this could still await me? The valley opens: an immense horizon stretching as far as one can see. No more track, no more road. In every direction the ground is covered by long, rough and greyish columns. This is the forest turned to stone. What terrible breath can have laid low upon the ground all these giant palm-trees at one single moment? Why do they all lie on the same side, with their roots and branches, and why has the vegetation frozen and grown hard, leaving quite distinct the fibres of the wood and the channels for the sap? Each vertebra has been broken off as though it had come unstuck, but they all lie end to end, like the rings of some gigantic reptile. There is nothing in the world more astounding. It is not a petrefaction produced by the chemical action of the earth, for everything lies upon the surface. So the vengeance of the gods fell upon the companions of Phineas. Is it ground from which the sea has receded? There is nothing like it to

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suggest the ordinary action of the waters. Was there a sudden cataclysm, a current in the waters of the flood? But, in this case, why did not the trees float? The mind becomes bewildered; it is better not to think about it.

At last I left this strange valley and hurriedly made my way back to Choubrah. I hardly noticed the hollows in the rocks where the hyenas live, or the whitened bones of the dromedaries which the passage of the caravans has left in plenty. I carried in my mind an impression greater even than that which the first sight of the pyramids had made upon me. Their forty centuries seemed very little in the presence of this irrefutable evidence of a primitive world destroyed at one blow.

## VI

### BREAKFAST IN QUARANTINE

We were again upon the Nile. Until we reached Batn-el-Bakarah, the *cow's belly*, where the lower corner of the Delta is, the banks were similar to those with which I was already familiar. The tips of the three pyramids, tinted with rose in the morning and the evening, which offer themselves to the traveller's admiration long before he reaches Cairo, and long again after he has left Boulaq, finally disappeared completely. Thereafter, we were sailing along the eastern branch of the Nile, that is to say, on the real bed of the river, for the Rosetta branch, which is more used by Europeans, is only a wide trench which ends in nothing, somewhere towards the west.

From the Damietta branch, the principal channels of the Delta start, and it is this which has the richest and

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most varied landscape to offer. No longer the monotonous scenes of the shores of the other branches, with a few skimpy palm-trees, villages of unburnt brick, with here and there tombs of santons with minarets to make them more lively, dovecots decorated with strange bosses, panoramic silhouettes always standing out against a horizon which has no background. The Damietta branch, or, if you prefer it, the *brame* has towns of some importance upon its banks, and goes through country that is productive. Its palm-trees are finer and more bushy; figs, pomegranates and tamarinds afford an infinite variety of shades of green. The shores of the river, where the many irrigating trenches flow into it, are covered with a primitive vegetation. From among the reeds which used to supply papyrus, and the different kinds of nenuphar, among which might perhaps be found the purple lotus of the ancients, thousands of birds and insects issue. Everything glitters, sparkles and hums, without taking any account of man, for not ten Europeans pass that way within a year, which means that shots rarely trouble these well-populated solitudes. The wild swan, the pelican, the pink flamingo, the white heron and the teal, play round the djermes and canges; though sometimes flights of doves, more easily alarmed, fly in long chaplets into the bluceness of the sky.

We left on our right Charakhanieh, which stands on the site of the ancient *Cercasorum*; Dagouch, once a haunt of the Nile brigands who, by night, used to swim after boats, hiding their heads in the cavity of a hollowed gourd; Atrib, which covers the ruins of Atribis, and Methram, a crowded modern town, whose mosque, with a square tower, was, it is said, a Christian church before the Arab conquest.

On the left bank there is the site of Busiris, now

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called Bouzir, but not a sign of any ruin; on the other side Semenoud, formerly Sebennitus, puts forth its domes and minarets above the green. The ruins of a huge temple, which appears to be that of Isis, are about two leagues from here. The capital of each column was formed by a woman's head; but the Arabs have used most of the columns to make grindstones for their windmills.

We spent the night before Mansourah, but I could not visit either the famous incubators of this town or the house of Ben-Lockman where Saint Louis lived when he was a prisoner. Bad news waited for me when I woke; the yellow flag of plague floated above Mansourah, and awaited us also at Damietta, so that we could hope to lay in no stock of provisions other than living animals. That was enough to spoil the most entrancing landscape in the world, and, unfortunately, the shores here became less fertile. After we left Pharescour, the picture of flooded rice-fields, the unwholesome odour of the marshes, decidedly gained the ascendant over those impressions of the beauty of Egypt which we had lately enjoyed. We had to wait until night for a magic view of the Nile broadening to a gulf, with woods of palm-trees still more tufted, and Damietta at last, with its Italian houses and green terraces on either bank—a sight which can only be compared to that of the entrance to the Grand Canal at Venice, with the added charm of a thousand pinnacles of the mosques standing out against the tinted mist of evening.

The cange was moored to the principal quay, before a huge building with the French flag; but we had to wait until the next day to have ourselves recognised, and obtain permission, in all our splendid health, to penetrate an ailing town. The yellow flag floated in a

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sinister manner over the naval offices, and the regulation was entirely in our own interests. But our provisions were exhausted, and we were promised but a sorry breakfast in the morning.

At daybreak, however, our flag had been noticed, which showed the usefulness of Madame Bonhomme's advice, and the janissary from the French Consulate came to offer his services. I had a letter for the Consul, and asked to see him personally. After going to warn him, the janissary returned to fetch me, telling me to take great care neither to touch anybody nor allow myself to be touched, on the way. He marched before me with his silver-knobbed stick and made the curious stand aside. At last we entered a huge stone building, with enormous doors, which looked like an *okel*, or caravansery. None the less, it was the Consul's house or, rather, that of the French consular agent, who is, at the same time, one of the richest rice dealers in Damietta.

I entered the chancellery, and the janissary pointed out his master. I was going gaily up to him with my letter in my hand. "*Aspetta!*" said he, and his air was less gracious than that of Colonel Barthélemy to those who would have embraced him. Indeed, he pushed me back with a white stick he held in his hand. I understood why he did this, and simply held the letter out to him. The Consul went out for a moment without a word, and returned with a pair of pincers. With them he seized the letter, put a corner of it under his foot, tore the envelope open very cleverly with the pincers, and then unfolded the sheet, which he kept at a distance from his eyes with the help of the same instrument.

Then his countenance cleared slightly. He called his chancellor, who was the only French-speaking

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person in the place, and invited me to breakfast, though he warned me that it would be in *quarantine*. I was by no means sure what such an invitation might entail, but I thought first of my companions in the cange, and asked what supplies the town could provide.

The Consul gave orders to the janissary, and I was able to secure bread, wine and poultry for them, these being the only articles of diet which were not supposed to pass on the plague. The poor slave was miserable in her cabin, and I brought her out and presented her to the Consul.

Seeing me return with her, the Consul frowned.

"Do you propose to take this woman to France?" said the chancellor.

"Perhaps, if she agrees, and it is possible. Meanwhile we are going to Beyruth."

"You know that she will be free as soon as she reaches France?"

"I regard her as free now."

"Do you know that if she gets tired of France you will be obliged to send her back to Egypt at your own expense?"

"No, I did not know that."

"You will do well to think about it. It would be better to sell her here."

"In a town where there is the plague? That would hardly be generous."

"Well, it is your business."

He explained everything to the Consul, who finally smiled, and decided to present the slave to his wife. Meanwhile, we were taken into the dining-room, the centre of which was taken up by a large round table. Here a new ceremony began.

The Consul pointed out to me the end of the table at which I was to sit; he sat down at the other end

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with his chancellor and a little boy, doubtless his son, whom he went to find in the women's apartments. The janissary stood by the side of the table to make the separation quite definite.

I had imagined that the poor Zeynab would also be invited, but, with the utmost of coolness, she had sat down cross-legged upon a rug, as if she were still at the bazaar. Perhaps she thought I had brought her there to sell her.

The chancellor began the conversation by telling me that the Consul was a Catholic business man from Syria, and that, as it was not the custom, even among Christians, to have women at table, the *khanoum* (mistress of the house) had been summoned solely in my honour.

The door opened, and a woman about thirty years old, and decidedly stout, advanced majestically into the room, and sat down opposite the janissary on a high chair with a footstool placed against the wall. She had on her head a huge conical head-dress, draped with a yellow shawl with golden ornaments. Her plaited hair and her bosom glittered with diamonds. She looked like a madonna, and her pale lily-white complexion enhanced the dark splendour of her eyes, whose lids and brows were painted in accordance with the usual custom.

Servants on each side of the room served us the same foods in different dishes, and it was explained to me that those on my side were not in quarantine, and that I had nothing to fear in case they should touch my clothes. I found it hard to understand how, in a plague-stricken town, anybody could be completely cut off from infection. I was, however, myself an example of this curious fact.

When breakfast was over, the *khanoum*, who had



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regarded us in silence without sitting at our table, warned by her husband of the presence of the slave I had brought, spoke to her, asked some questions and ordered food to be given her. A little round table, like those customary in the country, was brought, and she, like myself, was served in quarantine.

The chancellor was then good enough to go with me to see the town. The magnificent array of houses on the shores of the Nile is, so to speak, only a theatrical piece of decoration; all the rest is dusty and melancholy. The very walls seem to breathe fever and plague. The janissary walked before us, pushing aside the livid crowd dressed in blue tatters. The only remarkable thing I saw was the tomb of a famous santon, honoured by the Turkish sailors; an old church built by the crusaders in the Byzantine style, and, at the gate of the city, a hill formed, it is said, of nothing but the bones of the army of Saint Louis.

I was afraid I should be obliged to spend several days in this desolate city. Fortunately, that very evening, the janissary told me that the *Santa-Barbara* ketch was to leave at daybreak for the Syrian coast. The Consul was good enough to take passage for the slave and myself upon it, and that evening we left Damietta to embark at sea upon this vessel. It was commanded by a Greek captain.

## PART VI

### THE "SANTA-BARBARA"

#### I

#### A COMPANION

"İstamboldan ! Ah ! Yelir firman !  
Yelir, Yelir, İstamboldan !"

THE voice was grave and sweet, the voice of a fair young man or of a dark young girl, fresh and penetrating, resounding like the song of a cicada disturbed, through the dusty mist of an Egyptian morning. That I might hear it better, I left open one of the windows of the cange, through whose golden grating I looked out, alas, upon an arid coast: we were already far from the cultivated plains and luxuriant palm-groves which surround Damietta. Leaving that town at nightfall, we had quickly come to Esbeh, the seaport and the original site of the crusader's city. I was hardly awake, surprised to find myself no longer rocked by the waves, and the song continued to reach me from time to time as if from someone sitting on the shore, whom I could not see because of the height of the rocks. Again the voice began with melancholy sweetness:

"Kaikelir ! İstamboldan ! . . .  
Yelir, Yelir, İstamboldan !"

I realised that the song was in praise of Stamboul, in some language which was new to me, and had not the

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harsh resonances of Arabic or Greek of which my ears were weary. The voice sounded like a summons to new peoples, new lands. Already I glimpsed, as in a mirage, the Queen of the Bosphorus amid her blue waters and her dark green foliage and, I must own, the contrast with the monotonous and burned-up landscape of Egypt had an irresistible attraction for me. Ready to weep for the shores of the Nile at some later time beneath the green cypresses of Pera, I called the life-giving air of Asia to the help of my senses, enervated as they were by the summer. Fortunately the presence of the janissary whom the Consul had ordered to accompany me promised me a speedy departure.

The ship was waiting for a favourable moment to pass the *borghaz*, the bar formed by the meeting of the seawater and that of the Nile, and a *djerme*, laden with rice belonging to the Consul, was to take us to the *Santa-Barbara* one league out at sea.

Again the voice began:

“ Ah ! Ah ! Ah ! drommatina !  
Drommatina dieljedelim ! ”

What can that mean ? I wondered. It must be Turkish, and I asked the janissary if he understood it. “ It is some dialect of the provinces,” he replied, “ and I only understand the Turkish of Constantinople. As for the singer, he is no one too respectable ; some poor homeless devil, a *banian*. ”

I have always observed with regret the constant contempt which a man who himself fulfils the functions of a servant displays for the poor man who seeks his fortune or lives in a position of independence. We left the boat, and on the top of the bank I saw a young man lying nonchalantly amid a tuft of dry reeds.

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Turning to the rising sun which was gradually forcing its way through the mist over the rice-fields, he continued his song, the words of which I gathered without much difficulty because of the many refrains.

“Deyouldoumou ! Bourouldoumou !  
Ali Osman yadjenamdah !”

In certain languages of the South there is a syllabic charm, a grace of intonation which suits the voices of women and young people, and one might listen to them gladly for hours at a time without understanding a word. Then the languorous song, the tremulous modulations which reminded me of old folk-songs, charmed me with the force of contrast and the unexpected—something pastoral, something of the dreaminess of a lover, poured, or so it seemed to me, from these words so rich in vowels and cadenced like the song of birds. Perhaps, I thought, it is some shepherd’s song from Trebizond or the Marmora. I seemed to hear doves cooing upon the tips of the yews; it was a song which should be sung in blue valleys, where swift-flowing waters brighten with flashes of silver the dark branches of the larches; where roses blossom luxuriantly on lofty bowers; where the goats cling to the green rocks as in some idyll of Theocritus.

I had come close to the young man. He saw me at last, and rising to his feet, greeted me with a “Good-day, Sir.”

He was a handsome lad with the features of a Circassian, white skinned and fair haired, with hair cut short but not shaven in the Arab style. A long robe of striped silk, and a coat of grey cloth were his attire, and a simple tarboosh of red felt served him as a head-dress; only its shape was fuller, and its crest better furnished with blue silk than the Egyptian

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caps. It showed that he was a direct subject of Abdul Mejid. His girdle, made of a few yards of cheap cashmere, bore, instead of the assortment of pistols and daggers with which every free man or paid servant usually makes his chest bristle, a copper set of writing implements about eighteen inches long. The case of this Oriental instrument held the ink, and the cover contained the reeds which are used as pens (*calam*). From a distance it might be taken for a dagger, but it was simply the peaceful insignia of an educated man.

I suddenly felt myself filled with good feeling towards this apparent colleague, and I was in some degree ashamed of the warlike attire which disguised my own profession. "Do you live in this part of the world?" I asked the unknown.

"No sir, I came with you from Damietta."

"What, with me?"

"Yes, the boatman took me into the cange and brought me here. I should have had myself presented to you, but you were asleep."

"That is all right," said I; "and where are you going?"

"I am going to ask your leave to go on the djerme too, so as to get to the ship on which you are sailing."

"I see no reason why you should not," said I, turning to the janissary, but the latter took me aside.

"I advise you not to take this fellow with you. You will be obliged to pay for him, for he has nothing but those writing materials; he is one of those vagabonds who write verses and such foolishness. He went to the Consul, but the Consul could make nothing out of him."

"My dear fellow," said I to the unknown, "I should be delighted to be of service to you, but I have

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hardly enough money to carry me to Beyrouth, where I must stay and wait for more."

"Never mind," he said, "I can live a few days here among the fellahs. I will wait until an Englishman comes this way."

This made me feel uncomfortable. I went off with the janissary through flooded fields, over a track across the sand-dunes till we came to the shore of Lake Menzaleh. The time that was needed to load the djerme with sacks of rice brought by different boats left us all the leisure necessary for this expedition.

## II

### LAKE MENZALEH

On our right we passed the village of Esbech, built of unbaked bricks, where there are the remains of an ancient mosque and some fragments of arches and towers which once belonged to the old Damietta, destroyed by the Arabs at the time of Saint Louis, because it was too much exposed to sudden attack. Once the sea bathed the walls of this city, but now it is a league away. So much space the land of Egypt gains every six hundred years. The caravans which cross the desert on their way to Syria come from time to time upon regular lines of ancient ruins buried in the sands, whose shape the desert wind sometimes deigns to outline. These spectral cities, stripped for a moment of their dusty shrouds, terrify the imaginative Arabs, who attribute their construction to genii. European scholars, who have examined them more closely, have rediscovered a series of cities built on the seashore by one dynasty or another of peasant

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kings or Theban conquerors. It is by calculating the extent of these withdrawals of the sea, as well as by the different layers of the Nile ooze, which can be traced by excavation and counted, that the antiquity of Egypt has been taken back forty thousand years. This may, perhaps, not seem to agree too well with Genesis; but these long centuries, given over to the interaction of land and water, have built up what the sacred book calls "matter without form," the organisation of living creatures being the only true principle of creation.

We reached the eastern shore of that strip of land on which Damietta is built; the sand on which we were walking glittered occasionally, and sometimes it seemed as though our feet broke through the glassy surface of ice. These were deposits of sea salt. A curtain of tall rushes, perhaps like those from which papyrus used to be made, still hid the shores of the lake from us, but at last we came to a creek made for the fishermen's boats, and from there I might have imagined I saw the ocean itself upon a calm day. Yet, distant islets, tinged with rose by the rising sun, crowned here and there by domes and minarets, seemed to suggest a greater degree of peace, and little boats with lateen sails moved in hundreds over the still surface of the waters.

It was Lake Menzaleh, the ancient *Mareotis*, and the ruins of Tanis still cover the principal island. At that end of it nearest to Syria once stood Peluse—Peluse, the ancient gateway to Egypt, through which there passed in turn Cambyzes, Alexander and Pompey—the last, to die there.

I was sorry that I could not go through the delightful islands which seem strewn upon the waters of the lake, and join in one of those magnificent fishing

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expeditions which supply all Egypt with fish. Birds of different kinds swoop and soar over this inland sea, float beside its shores, or take refuge among the foliage of the sycamores, cassias and tamarinds; the brooks and irrigation channels which cross the rice-fields in every direction bring out a varied growth of marsh vegetation. Reeds, rushes, nenuphars, and doubtless the lotus of the ancients also, cover the greenish water and buzz with the hum of a host of insects which the birds pursue. So is fulfilled that eternal movement of primitive nature in which the spirits of fruitfulness and destruction war eternally together.

When, after crossing the plain, we were back again upon the jetty, I heard the voice of the young man who had spoken to me. He was still repeating "*Yelir, Yelir, Istambouldan!*" I was afraid that I had acted wrongly in refusing his request, and decided to reopen the conversation by asking him the meaning of what he was singing. "It is a song," said he, "which was composed at the time of the massacre of the janissaries. It was my cradle song."

What! said I to myself, do these sweet sounding words, that languorous tune, represent ideas of death and carnage? It is indeed somewhat removed from the eclogue.

This is what the song meant:

"It is coming from Stamboul, the firman (which announced the destruction of the janissaries). A ship is bringing it; Ali Osman waits for it; a ship arrives; but the firman is not upon her, and all the people wait uncertainly.

"A second ship arrives; this at last is the one which Ali Osman awaited. All the Mussulmans put on their embroidered garments, and go to seek amusement in the countryside, for this time it has certainly come—the firman."



## LAKE MENZALEH

What use is there in trying to get to the bottom of things? I should have preferred not to know the meaning of the words. Instead of a herdsman's song or the dream of a traveller thinking of Stamboul, there was nothing but a silly political song for me to remember.

"I ask nothing better," I said in a low tone to the young man, "than to let you join us on the djerme, but perhaps your song has annoyed the janissary, although he certainly seemed not to understand it."

"He, a janissary?" said the young man. "There is none of them left in all the Empire. The Consuls give the name, out of habit, to their cavasses; but he is only an Albanian just as I am an Armenian. He is angry with me, because when I was at Damietta I offered my services to strangers who wished to go about the town. Now, I am going to Beyrouth."

I succeeded in making the janissary realise that there would be no further motive for his resentment. "Ask him," he said, "whether he has any money to pay his passage on the ship."

"Captain Nicolas is a friend of mine," replied the Armenian.

The janissary shook his head, but made no remark. The young man got up slowly, picked up a little parcel which could hardly be seen under his arm, and followed us. All my luggage had already been put aboard the djerme, and it was now heavily laden. The Javanese slave, who was so delighted at the idea of going to a new place that she had forgotten all about Egypt, clapped her dark hands for joy when she found we were about to set off, and saw to the stowing of the fowls and pigeons. The fear of going short of food weighs heavily on simple souls. The sanitary condition of Damietta had not allowed us to secure

## THE SANTA-BARBARA

more varied provisions. But there was no shortage of rice, and we were to live on nothing else but pillau during the whole journey.

### III

#### THE KETCH

We went down the Nile for another league, the flat sandy shores getting farther and farther apart till they could only just be seen. By this time the *boghaz*, which prevents ships from going up to Damietta, seemed hardly more than an almost imperceptible bar. Two fortresses guard this entrance, which was often crossed in the Middle Ages, but is almost always fatal to ships.

To-day, thanks to the steam-engine, ocean voyages are so free from danger, that it is not without a certain degree of anxiety that one embarks upon a sailing-ship. For on them is renewed that element of luck which gives the fishes at least a chance of revenge for the voracity of humans, or, if the Fates are generous, the possibility of wandering for ten years upon inhospitable shores, like the heroes of the *Æneid* or the *Odyssey*. Now, if a ship, primitive and calculated to give rise to any such fancies, ever sailed the blue waters of the Syrian Gulf, the ketch that had been christened *Santa-Barbara* realised its ideal to the fullest extent. When, while still some distance away, I beheld this gloomy carcass, like a coal ship, with a long yard, fitted for a single triangular sail, upon its only mast, I realised that my luck was out, and for a moment thought of refusing such a means of transport. But what was I to do? Return to a plague-stricken town and wait

## THE KETCH

for a European brig to turn up (for there are no steamers upon this route)—that seemed hardly less risky. I looked at my companions: they appeared neither dissatisfied nor surprised; the janissary seemed convinced that he had made the best possible arrangement; no amusement appeared beneath the bronze mask of the men who rowed the djerme; it seemed, therefore, that there was nothing ridiculous or impossible about this ship, so far as the people of the country were concerned. But this picture of a shapeless galleas, this thing that looked like a gigantic clog sunk in the water right down to the edge under the weight of the sacks of rice, did not seem to promise a rapid crossing. If the winds should prove but slightly contrary, we might quite likely make the acquaintance of the inhospitable land of the Lestrigons, or the porphyry rocks of the Pheacians. Oh Ulysses! Telemachus! Æneas! Was I fated to verify in my own person the reality of that journey of yours?

However, the djerme hailed the ship; we were thrown a rope ladder with wooden rungs, helped up, and introduced to the delights on board the vessel. "*Kalimera*" (good day), said the captain. He was dressed like his sailors, but this salutation in Greek made him known to us. He hastened to attend to the loading of his ship, which was more important than our own. The sacks of rice formed a mountain in the stern, beyond which a little part of the poop was reserved for the pilot and the captain. It was impossible, therefore, to take a walk except over the sacks, the middle of the ship being taken up by the longboat, and the two sides cluttered up with cages of poultry. The only space, and that none too great, was left before the galley, which was entrusted to the care of a very lively young cabin boy.

## THE SANTA-BARBARA

Immediately this young man saw the slave he called out: "*Kokona! kali, kali!*" (a woman, beautiful, beautiful). This was a great departure from Arab reserve, which does not permit the slightest notice to be taken either of a woman or a child. The janissary had come on board and was watching the Consul's merchandise being loaded. "You there!" said I, "where are we going to be lodged? You promised me we should have the captain's room."

"Don't worry," he replied, "all these sacks will be put in order, and then all will be well." Whereupon he bade us farewell, and went down into the *djermc*, which quickly made off.

There we were, for God only knew how long a time, on one of those Syrian ships which the least little storm smashes upon the coast like a cockle-shell. We had to wait for the west wind at three o'clock before we could set sail. Meanwhile, breakfast was the chief concern. Captain Nicolas had given his orders, and his pillau was cooking on the only stove the cook's galley possessed, and we had to wait our turn.

I tried to find out the whereabouts of this famous captain's room which had been promised us, and asked the Armenian to find out from *his friend*, who appeared never to have seen him in his life before. The captain rose coldly, and conducted us to a kind of store-room under the foredeck. It was impossible to get into it except bent almost double; its walls were literally covered with those red crickets, as long as one's finger, which they call *cancrelats*, which had doubtless been attracted by a previous cargo of sugar. I drew back in horror, and showed that I was angry. "That is my room," said the captain, "but I do not advise you to live in it, unless it should come on to

## THE KETCH

rain. I will show you another place much fresher and more desirable."

Then he took me to the longboat which was held by ropes between the mast and the prow, and made me look inside. "In there," said he, "you can sleep excellently. You have mattresses which you can stretch out from one end to the other, and I will have canvas put over to make a tent. There you are now, comfortably housed and well. Is it not so?"

It would have been ungracious of me not to agree. The ship being what it was, it was decidedly the most agreeable spot in an African temperature, and as much apart as we were likely to find.

## IV

### ANDARE SUL MARE

We are off: the fringe of sand, which forms such a melancholy frame to the splendours of ancient Egypt, grows smaller, sinks, and finally disappears beneath the blue level of the sea. The powdery sparkle of the desert alone remains upon the horizon: the birds of the Nile go a little way with us, then, one after another, leave us, as though to rejoin the sun which is going down in the direction of Alexandria. But, little by little, a bright star climbs higher in the skies, and casts its glittering reflection upon the waters. It is the evening star, Astarte, the ancient goddess of Syria, and she shines with incomparable splendour over the sacred seas which still own her sway.

Be gracious unto us, O goddess! Thou that hast not the sallow hue of the moon, but shinest brightly

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in thy far distance, and sheddest golden rays upon the world like a sun of the night !

After all, once we had got over our first impression, the deck of the *Santa-Barbara* was not lacking in the picturesque. The next day we were perfectly at home; the hours rolled on both for us and for the crew, and we gave no thought to the future. I believe the ship was steered like those of the ancients, all day by the sun and all night by the stars. The captain showed me a compass, but it was out of order. This good fellow's face seemed at once gentle and resolute, and it bore the marks of a strange simplicity which gave me more confidence in himself than in his ship. Yet he owned to me that he had been a bit of a pirate, though only during the war of Greek independence. This was after he had invited me to join him at a dinner which consisted of a pillau like a pyramid, into which we each plunged a little wooden spoon in turn. This was something of an advance on the Arab's method of eating, for they only use their fingers.

An earthen bottle, filled with Cyprus wine, that vintage which is called by the name of the Commandery, brightened up the after-dinner period. The captain became more expansive, and was good enough to make me acquainted with his affairs. Having asked me if I could read Latin, he brought out of a case a large parchment sheet, which contained the clearest titles to respectability his ketch could show. He wished to know what the document said.

I set myself to read it, and learned that "the Fathers-Secretary of the Holy Land called down the blessing of the Virgin and Saints upon the ship, and certified that Captain *Alexis*, a Greek Catholic, native of Taraboulous (Tripoli in Syria), had always fulfilled his religious duties."

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"They put Alexis," said the captain, "but of course they meant Nicolas. It was a mistake."

I agreed, thinking to myself that if he had no more official document than that, he would do well to keep away from European shores. The Turks are very easily satisfied: the red seal and the cross set upon this certificate of confession were enough, together with backsheesh, to satisfy the demands of the Mussulman legal authorities.

Nothing is more jolly than the period after dinner at sea in fair weather. The breeze is cool; the sun dodges round the sail, whose uncertain shadow forces us to change our places from time to time. Finally, the shade leaves us altogether, and casts its useless coolness over the sea. It might be worth while to stretch a piece of canvas over the poop, but nobody thinks of doing so, and the sun makes our foreheads golden like ripe fruits. So the beauty of my Javanese slave achieved its fullest triumph. I had never thought for a moment of making her keep her veil, for I had a quite natural feeling that a Frank who owned a woman had no right to hide her. The Armenian sat down near her on the sacks of rice, and I was watching the captain playing chess with the pilot. Several times I heard him say in a childish falsetto: "*Ked ya, siti!*" which, I think, meant "Well, madame!" For some time, with that pride which was habitual to her, she did not answer, but finally she turned to the young man, and so a conversation was begun.

That moment I realised how much I had lost by not being able to speak Arabic fluently. Her brow cleared, her lips smiled, and she soon gave herself up to that ineffable chatter which, in all lands, seems to be a necessity to the fairer portion of humanity. I was glad to have been the means of giving her so much

## THE SANTA-BARBARA .

pleasure. The Armenian appeared to be most respectful, and, turning from time to time in my direction, was doubtless telling her how I had met and welcomed him. We should not apply our own ideas to things that happen in the Orient, and imagine that conversation between a man and a woman immediately becomes . . . criminal. There is much more simplicity in their character than in ours, and I was sure that this was nothing more than innocent chatter. The expression of their faces and the few words I caught every now and again were sufficient to prove to me the harmlessness of the dialogue, and I remained absorbed in watching the game of chess (and what chess!) between the captain and his pilot. In thought I compared myself to those good-natured husbands who, at a party, sit down at the gaming tables and, without the slightest jealousy, leave their wives and young people to talk or dance.

Besides, what is a poor devil of an Armenian whom one has picked up out of the reeds on the banks of the Nile compared with a Frank from Cairo who has lived the life of a *mirliva* (general) in the estimation of the dragomans and a whole quarter? If, to a nun, a gardener is a man, as they used to say a century ago in France, that is no reason to assume that the first comer means anything very much to a Mussulman *cadine*. Women of rank, like the great birds, have a certain natural pride which defends them against seduction by the common herd. It seemed to me, moreover, that by abandoning her to her own sense of dignity I was assuring to myself the confidence and the devotion of this poor slave, whom, as I have said before, I considered free the moment she had left the soil of Egypt and set foot upon a Christian boat.

Christian! I wonder if that is the right word.



## ANDARE SUL MARE

The *Santa-Barbara* had only Turkish sailors in her crew; the captain and his cabin boy represented the Roman Church; the Armenian, a heresy of some sort, and I . . . But who can say what a Parisian brought up on philosophic ideas, a child of Voltaire, an infidel in the opinion of these good people, can represent in the Orient? Every morning, at the moment when the sun rose from out of the sea; every evening, when its orb, invaded by the dark line of waters, was, in a minute, eclipsed, leaving on the horizon that rosy tint which blends so exquisitely in the blue, the sailors gathered in a single row, turning towards the distant Mecca, and one of them intoned the hymn of prayer, as the grave muezzin from the top of the minaret. I could not prevent the slave from joining in this religious exercise, touching and solemn as it was; so from the first day we found ourselves all divided among different communions. From time to time the captain prayed to an image nailed to the mast, which was perhaps that of the patron saint of the ship, *Santa-Barbara*; the Armenian, when he got up, after washing his head and feet with soap, murmured some litanies in a low voice, and I alone, who could not bring myself to pretend, made no religious genuflection, though I was somehow ashamed to appear less religious than the others. There is a mutual tolerance among Orientals in matters of religion, each simply considering himself on a higher plane in the spiritual hierarchy, but admitting that other religions may, if necessary, be good enough to serve as a footstool. The simple philosopher, however, does not fit into this scheme of things: where can he be placed? The Koran itself, which curses idolaters and those who worship fire and the stars, never took into consideration the sceptic of our own days.

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## V

### IDYLL

On the third day of our voyage we ought to have come in sight of the coast of Syria, but all the morning we hardly moved, and the wind, which got up at three o'clock, only filled the sail in occasional gusts, then let it fall back again against the mast. The captain did not seem to be greatly perturbed. He divided his leisure between his chess and a kind of guitar with which he always accompanied the same song. In the East everyone has his favourite tune, and repeats it tirelessly from morning till night, until he learns another, newer, one. The slave had learned at Cairo some harem song or other with a continually recurring refrain and a slow and sleepy melody. It consisted, I remember, of the two following lines:

“Ya kabibé ! sakel nô ! . . .  
Ya makmouby ! ya sidi !”

A few of the words I understood, but there was no *kabibé* in my vocabulary. I asked the Armenian what it meant, and he told me: “A little rascal.” I noted this word in my pocket-book with the explanation, as is right and proper when one wishes to learn.

That evening the Armenian told me it was unfortunate that the wind was not better, and that he was in consequence a little anxious.

“Why?” said I. “We only run the risk of staying two days more, and we are certainly comfortable enough upon this ship.”

“It is not that,” he said, “but we might run short of water.”

## IDYLL

“Run short of water!”

“Certainly; you have no idea how careless these people are. To obtain water, they would have had to send a boat to Damietta, for that at the mouth of the Nile is salty; and as the town was in quarantine, they were afraid of formalities—at least, that is what they say, but, as a matter of fact, they never thought about it.”

“You surprise me,” I said; “there is the captain singing as if we were perfectly all right.” I went with the Armenian to ask him a few questions on the subject.

He got up, showed me the water barrels on the deck, perfectly empty, except for one which perhaps still held five or six bottles of water; then he sat down on the poop again, and taking up his guitar, began his eternal song again, leaning his head against the bulwark.

The next morning I woke early, and went upon the forecastle thinking that I might be able to see the coast of Palestine. But in vain I wiped my glasses, the line of the sea was as unbroken as the curved blade of a damaskin. Probably we had not moved all night. I went down again and made my way to the stern. Everybody was serenely sleeping; only the young cabin boy was up. He was dressing, and washing his hands and face quite copiously with the water he had taken from our last barrel of drinking water.

I could not refrain from expressing my indignation. I told him—or at least I thought I told him—that sea water was good enough for a *little rascal* like him to wash in; and wishing to make this last expression quite clear I used the word *ya kabibé*, which I had noted in my book. The boy looked at me and smiled, but did not seem much upset by my rebuke. I decided I had

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not pronounced the word properly, and thought no more about it.

Some hours afterwards, at that moment after dinner when Captain Nicolas usually told the cabin boy to bring out an enormous flagon of Cyprus wine, of which only we, the Armenian and myself, as Christians, were invited to partake, the sailors, out of a mis-conceived respect for the law of Mahomet, only drinking anise brandy, the captain began to speak in a low tone in the Armenian's ear.

"He has a suggestion to make to you," said the Armenian.

"Let him make it."

"He says it is a rather delicate matter, and he hopes you will not be angry if the idea does not appeal to you."

"Not in the least."

"Well, he would like to know if you will exchange your slave for his *ya ouled* (little boy)."

I was on the point of bursting out laughing, but I was disconcerted by the perfect seriousness of the two Levantines. I thought then that it must be one of those bad jokes which Orientals only permit themselves in situations where a Frank would find it difficult to make them repent it. I said as much to the Armenian, who replied to me with astonishment.

"But no, he is absolutely in earnest. The little boy is very fair and the woman dark, and," he added with an air of conscientious appreciation, "I advise you to think about it—the little boy is well worth the woman."

I am not easily astonished: indeed, it would be labour lost in this country, so I contented myself with saying that I didn't care for the bargain. Then, as I showed some signs of temper, the captain told the

## IDYLL

Armenian that he was sorry if he had been indiscreet, but he had thought he would please me. I was not quite sure what he meant, and I thought I detected a certain irony in his conversation, so I asked the Armenian to urge him to explain himself clearly on this point.

"Well," said the Armenian, "he suggests that you were paying compliments to the *ya ouled* this morning—at least, that is what the boy told him."

"What!" I cried. "I called him a little rascal because he was washing his hands in our drinking water. You are quite wrong; I was furious with him."

The Armenian's astonishment made me realise that in this business there was one of those absurd philosophical misunderstandings which are by no means uncommon between people who do not understand each other's language sufficiently well. The word *kabibé*, which the Armenian had so strangely translated the evening before, had, on the contrary, the most delightful and affectionate meaning in the world. Why he had thought "little rascal" would convey this idea perfectly in French I cannot imagine.

We had to find a new and revised translation of the refrain the slave had sung, which now undoubtedly meant something like:

"Oh, my little darling, my well-beloved, my brother, my master!"

In this way all Arabic love songs begin. They are susceptible of the most diverse interpretations, and to beginners certainly suggest the classical ambiguity of the eclogue of Corydon.

# THE SANTA-BARBARA

## VI

### DIARY OF THE VOYAGE

The simple truth has not the tremendous resources of drama or romance. One by one I deal with events which have only the merit of their simplicity, though I am well aware that it would be easy, even in the story of a voyage so ordinary as that across the Gulf of Syria, to invent catastrophes really worth attention. But the stern glance of truth is ever ready to abash him who romances, and, it seems to me, it is wiser to say simply, as the old voyagers did: "On such a day we saw nothing but a piece of wood upon the sea floating with the waves; on such another only a gull with grey wings." It is better to go on in this way until the rare moment when the action begins to get warm and is complicated by the arrival of a canoe full of savages bringing yams and roast sucking-pigs.

However, failing the indispensable tempest, a dead calm worthy of the Pacific Ocean, and shortage of water upon a ship like ours, might provide scope for scenes worthy of a modern Odyssey. But the Fates took away from me even that chance of being interesting, when, that evening, they sent a gentle breeze from the West which carried us swiftly along.

This, however, delighted me, and I got the captain to repeat his assurance that the following morning we should see the bluish peaks of Carmel upon the horizon. Suddenly there were cries of alarm from the poop. "*Farqha el bahr ! farqha el bahr !*" (What is the matter ? A fowl overboard !). It did not seem to me a very serious matter, but the Turkish sailor to whom the fowl belonged seemed terribly distressed,

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and his compatriots were commiserating him in all seriousness. They held him back so that he should not throw himself into the water, while the fowl, which was already some distance away, was showing signs of distress, the stages of which were watched with emotion. Finally, the captain, after a moment's hesitation, ordered the ship to be stopped.

Just at this moment, I thought it rather too bad that after we had lost two days, and had just got a favourable wind, we should stop for a drowned hen. I gave the sailor two piastres, thinking that that would settle the matter once and for all, for an Arab would let himself be killed for much less. His face cleared, but evidently he at once came to the conclusion that he would gain twice over if he got his fowl back, and in a twinkling he took off his clothes and jumped into the sea.

He swam a tremendous distance. For half an hour we had to wait anxiously, for night had nearly fallen. At last he came back to us exhausted, and had to be pulled out of the water, for he had not strength enough to climb over the rail.

Once more safe and sound, the man took more trouble over his fowl than over himself; he warmed it, sponged it, and was not satisfied till he saw it breathe more easily, and hop about the deck.

The ship was again under way. "Devil take the fowl!" I said to the Armenian. "We have lost an hour."

"What? Would you have had it left to drown?"

"But I have fowls too, and I would have given him several for that one."

"It is not the same thing."

"What do you mean? I would sacrifice all the fowls on earth so as not to lose an hour of this favour-

## THE SANTA-BARBARA

able wind, on a ship where we might die of thirst to-morrow."

"You see," said the Armenian, "the fowl flew off to his left, just when he was getting ready to cut its throat."

"I would willingly admit," said I, "that, like a good Mussulman, he risked his own life to save that of another living creature; but I know that the respect of these true believers for animals does not go so far as all that, since they kill them for food."

"Certainly they kill them, but with due ceremony and with prayer; and then they will not slit a throat except with a knife whose handle has three nail holes in it, and whose blade is flawless. If that fowl had been drowned just now, the poor fellow was certain to die in less than three days hence."

"Then it is a different matter," I said to the Armenian.

It is always a serious business for an Oriental to kill an animal. He is only allowed to do so expressly for his own food, and with forms which are reminiscent of the ancient sacrificial rites. You will remember that the Israelites have a somewhat similar practice; their butchers are compelled to employ sacrificers (*schocket*) who are ecclesiastics, and never kill a single beast without the proper ritual. The same idea is to be found with different shades of force in nearly all the religions of the Levant. Hunting is only tolerated when it is that of wild beasts, and then it is considered a punishment for the damage they have caused. Yet, at the time of the caliphs, hunting with a falcon was a favourite amusement of the great, though it was only justified by a quibble which cast upon the bird the responsibility for the blood shed. Indeed, without going so far as to adopt



## DIARY OF THE VOYAGE

Indian principles, it may be owned that there is something noble in this idea of never killing any animal except in case of necessity. The formulas which have to be observed when an animal is killed to provide food are undoubtedly intended to prevent long-drawn-out suffering, though this is unfortunately impossible in hunting.

In this connection the Armenian told me a story of Mahmoud's time, when Constantinople was so filled with dogs that carriages could hardly get through the streets. They could not be destroyed, since they were neither wild beasts nor fit for food, so somebody conceived the notion of putting them upon the desert islands at the mouth of the Bosphorus. They had to be embarked by thousands in little boats; and at the moment when, ignorant of the fate awaiting them, they entered into possession of their new domain, an iman made a speech to them, explaining that it was only absolute necessity which had driven the authorities to this course, and that their souls, at the hour of death, should not be angry with the faithful believers, and, moreover, if it should be the will of Heaven that they should be saved, this would assuredly come to pass. There were many rabbits on these islands, and, at the outset, the dogs found nothing to complain of in this Jesuitical argument; but, a few days later, tormented by hunger, they uttered such terrible groanings that they could be heard in Constantinople. The faithful, moved by this lamentable protest, addressed grave remonstrances to the Sultan, who was already suspect of too great fondness for European ideas; he was compelled to give orders that the dogs should be brought back, and they were triumphantly reinstalled in possession of all their civic rights.

# THE SANTA-BARBARA

## VII

### CATASTROPHE

The Armenian provided me with an element of distraction amid the boredom of such a voyage, and I was pleased to see that his gaiety, his incessant flow of small talk, his stories and his observations, gave my poor Zeynab an opportunity—so appreciated by the women of those countries—to express her opinions with that flow of nasal and guttural consonants in which I found it hard not only to know what she was talking about, but even to recognise the sounds themselves.

With the magnanimity of a European, I did not raise any objection when one or other of the sailors who happened to be sitting near us on the rice sacks spoke a few words to her. In the Orient the common people are usually familiar: in the first place, because the sentiment of equality is more genuinely established with them than it is with us, and secondly, because a kind of innate politeness is to be found in all classes. Education is everywhere the same—exceedingly summary, but universal. It is because of this that a man of humble origin can become directly the favourite of a man of position, and can climb to the highest ranks without finding himself in the least out of place.

Among our sailors there was a certain Anatolian Turk, a very dark man with a beard growing grey, who talked to the slave more frequently and for longer periods than the others. I noticed this, and asked the Armenian what he was talking about. He listened for a while, and then said: "They are talking about religion." This seemed to me to be quite as it should

## CATASTROPHE

be, the more so as this was the man who, being a *badji*, or pilgrim, from Mecca, offered the morning and evening prayer for the others. I had never for a moment dreamed of interfering with the religious practices of this poor woman, whom a whim of fate, at no great cost to myself, had placed in my hands. When she was ill at Cairo, I had tried to persuade her to give up the custom of putting her hands and feet into cold water every morning at her devotions; but she had paid small attention to my suggestions with regard to her health, and had done no more than consent to give up staining herself with henna, which, since it only lasts for about six days, compels the women of the Orient frequently to renew a type of self-adornment which is very ugly when examined closely. I am no enemy of dye on eyebrows and eyelids; I have no objection even to rouge on lips and cheeks; but what can be the point in staining yellow, hands that are already the colour of copper, so that afterwards they look like saffron? On that point I had been inflexible.

The hair upon her forehead had grown again, and was nearly ready to be joined to the long tresses with their silken bows and tingling sequins (imitation sequins, unfortunately), which fell from the head to the heels in the Levantine fashion. The *tatikos* with its golden ribbons drooped gracefully over her left ear, and her arms were covered with row after row of heavy rings of silvered copper, roughly painted in red and blue, a typically Egyptian form of adornment. Others tinkled at her heels, in spite of the prohibition in the Koran which forbids a woman to allow the jewels which adorn her feet to make any sound.

I admired her so, in her graceful robe of silk, with

## THE SANTA-BARBARA

the blue *milayeh* about her, looking, as the women of the Orient do look, like an ancient statue, though they are utterly unaware of the fact. An unusual animation in her gestures, an unaccustomed expression in her face, occasionally impressed me, though it caused me no uneasiness. The sailor who was talking to her might have been her grandfather, and he did not seem afraid of being overheard.

"Do you know what is the matter?" said the Armenian to me. He had been near the sailors who were talking together. "They say that the woman you have with you does not belong to you."

"They are mistaken," I said. "You can tell them from me that she was sold to me at Cairo by Abd-el-Kerim for five purses. I have the receipt in my pocket-book. In any case, it has nothing to do with them."

"They say that the merchant had no right to sell a Mussulman woman to a Christian."

"I don't care what they think. At Cairo, people know better. All the Franks there have slaves, Christian and Mussulman."

"But those are only negroes or Abyssinians; they are not allowed to have white slaves."

"Do you call her white?"

The Armenian shook his head, but doubtfully.

"Listen," said I. "So far as my rights are concerned, I have no doubt about them, for I made all the necessary inquiries before I bought her. Now tell the captain that I do not care to have the sailors talking to her."

"The captain," said he, after speaking to that gentleman, "says you might have forbidden her yourself, when you first came on board."

"I did not wish to deprive her of the pleasure of

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speaking her own language, or to prevent her from joining in the prayers: besides, the ship being built as she is, so that there is no privacy for anybody, it would have been hard to prevent the exchange of a few words."

Captain Nicolas did not look very well pleased, but this I attributed to a certain resentment because I had not accepted his offer of an exchange. However, he sent for the *badji* sailor, whom I had picked out as being the most evilly disposed, and spoke to him. I would say nothing to the slave, for I was determined not to appear in the odious part of a tyrannical master.

The sailor seemed to answer the captain with a very haughty air, and the Armenian was asked to tell me not to bother any more about the matter. The sailor, he said, was a fanatic, a kind of saint whom his comrades respected for his piety, but what he said was of no great importance.

As a matter of fact, the man did not speak to the slave again, but he spoke in a very loud tone to his comrades in front of her, and I understood enough to realise that he was talking of the *muslim* and the *roumi*. I felt I must bring matters to a head, for I saw no way of avoiding this system of insinuation. I decided to call the slave, and with the help of the Armenian we had something like the following conversation:

"What is it that these fellows were saying to you just now?"

"That it was wrong for me, as a believer, to stay with an infidel."

"But don't they know that I have bought you?"

"They say that nobody had any right to sell me to you."

"Do you believe that to be true?"

"God knows."

## THE SANTA-BARBARA

"These fellows are wrong, and you must not speak to them again."

"Very well."

I asked the Armenian to amuse her and tell her some stories. After all, this young man had turned out useful. He always spoke to her in that musical delicate tone which people use when they are talking to children. and he invariably began, "*Ked ya, siti?*" "Well, madame, what is the matter? Why aren't we laughing? Would you like to hear the story of the head cooked in the oven?" Then he told her an old Constantinople legend, in which a tailor, thinking that he was given one of the Sultan's garments to repair, took home with him the head of an *aga* which had been given him by mistake. Not knowing how to get rid of this uncomfortable burden, he sent it in an earthen vessel to be cooked at a Greek pastrycook's. The latter handed it on to a Frankish barber, substituting it on the sly for the barber's wig block. The Frank dressed it, and then, seeing what he had done, took it somewhere else, so that there was a whole succession of more or less comical blunders. It is an example of the most appreciated type of Turkish humour.

The evening prayer entailed the customary ceremonies. So that I should not scandalise anybody, I went to walk on the fore-castle, watching the stars rise, and myself praying also—a prayer of my own which is that of dreamers and poets, a prayer expressive of admiration for nature and the joys of memory. Yes, in that air of the East which is so pure that it brings the heavens near to men I admired those star-gods, those different sacred forms which the Divinity has cast off from time to time like the masks of the eternal Isis. . . . Urania, Astarte, Saturn, Jupiter, to me you still represent the transformations of the simple beliefs

## CATASTROPHE

of our forefathers. They, who in their millions sailed those seas, doubtless took the glow for the flame and the throne for the god; but who would not adore in the stars of the firmament the evidences of eternal night, and in their regular movement the watchful action of a hidden spirit?

### VIII

#### THE MENACE

As I was returning to the captain, I saw, in a corner by the longboat, the slave and the *badji* continuing their discussions of religion in spite of my prohibition.

This time, I was compelled to act. I pulled the slave roughly by the arm, and she fell, very softly certainly, on one of the rice sacks.

“*Giaour!*” she cried.

“I understood that word perfectly, and I knew I must not weaken. “*Enté giaour!*” I replied, none too sure whether this latter word could be used in the feminine. “Infidel yourself!” and, pointing to the *badji*, I added: “He is a dog (*kelb*).”

I do not know whether I was most angered at finding myself held up to contempt as a Christian, or whether it was the thought of the ingratitude of this woman whom I had always treated as an equal. The *badji*, hearing himself termed a dog, made a threatening gesture, but finally turned to his companions with that cowardice which is habitual in Arabs of the lower classes. They would never think of attacking a Frank single-handed. Two or three of them advanced towards me uttering threats, and, mechanically, I grasped one of the pistols in my belt, forgetting that these weapons

## THE SANTA-BARBARA

with their glittering handles are usually fatal only to the hand which fires them. I must also admit that they were not loaded.

"What are you thinking about?" said the Armenian, grasping my arm. "He is a madman, and these fellows think he is a saint. Let them make a row, the captain will talk to them."

The slave pretended to weep, as if I had hurt her badly, and would not move from the place where she had fallen. The captain came up and said with his indifferent air: "What do you expect? They are savages," and addressed a few gentle words to them. "Tell them," I said to the Armenian, "that when we reach land I shall go and see the Pasha, and he will give them a beating."

I am inclined to believe that the Armenian translated this threat by some compliment which had moderation stamped all over it. They said no more, but I felt that their silence left me in a somewhat doubtful position. Fortunately, I remembered that I had in my pocket-case a letter of recommendation to the Pasha of Acre which had been given to me by my friend A. R., who had been a member of the Constantinople divan. I drew the case from my waistcoat, and it caused a general state of uneasiness. The pistol would only have meant my being overpowered, especially since it was of Arab make; but common people in the Orient always imagine that Europeans are possessed of magic powers in some measure, and, at any given moment, able to take out of their pockets a charm mighty enough to destroy a whole army. They were somewhat reassured when they saw that all I took from the case was a letter, though it was very prettily written in Arabic and addressed to H. E. Mehmed-R\*\*\*, Pasha of Acre, who had, some time before, spent a long time in France.



## THE MENACE

But what was most fortunate, both in my idea and in my situation, was that we were just off Acre, where we should have to put in for water. The town was not yet within sight, but, if the wind continued, we could not fail to arrive there the next day. As for Mehmed-Pasha, who on another occasion was to prove himself worthy to be called my providence and confusion to my enemies, I had met him at several evening parties in Paris. He had given me Turkish tobacco and shown himself extremely amiable. The letter I carried reminded him of this fact, in case time and his new greatness should have effaced me from his memory; but by producing this letter it was made clear that I was a person very strongly recommended.

The reading of the document produced the effect of Neptune's *quos ego*. The Armenian, after raising the letter to his forehead as a mark of respect, removed the envelope which, as is customary in the case of introductions, was not sealed, and showed the text to the captain as he read it. Thereafter, the beating I had promised was no longer an illusion for the *badji* and his friends. The rascals hung their heads, and the captain explained his own behaviour by his fear of hurting their religious susceptibilities, he himself being only a poor Greek subject of the Sultan (*raya*), who had no authority except by reason of his service. "As for the woman," said he, "if you are Mehmed-Pasha's friend, she is yours indeed, for who would dare to fight against the favour of the great?"

The slave had not moved, but she had understood well enough what had been said. She could have no doubt about her position for the moment, for, in Turkish countries, influence is more powerful than any right; however, I was determined to establish my own right in the eyes of all.

## THE SANTA-BARBARA

"Were you not born," I said to her, "in a country which does not belong to the Sultan of the Turks?"

"It is true," she replied, "I am *Hindi* (an Indian)."

"Then you can be in the service of a Frank just as much as the Abyssinians (*habesch*) who are copper-coloured like you, and quite as good as you are."

"*Aioua* (yes)!" said she, as if she were convinced, "*ana memlouk enté*" (I am your slave).

"But," I added, "do you remember that before we left Cairo I offered you the chance of freedom? You told me you had nowhere to go."

"It is true; it would have been better to sell me again."

"So you only came with me to change your country, and then to leave me? Very well, since you are so ungrateful, you shall remain a slave for ever, and you shall not be a *cadine* but a servant. Hereafter, you shall keep your veil, and stay in the captain's room . . . with the crickets. You must not speak to anyone here again."

Without a word, she put on her veil, and went and sat down in the little room under the fore-castle.

Perhaps I had yielded in some measure to a desire to produce an effect upon these people who were in turn insolent and servile, for ever at the mercy of the impression of the moment. They must be known before it is possible to understand why despotism is the normal form of government in the Orient. The most modest of travellers very soon finds himself compelled, unless his sumptuous mode of life inspires respect for him at the outset, to adopt a theatrical pose and to display, over and over again, signs of resolute determination which, thereafter, he may exhibit without any danger. The Arab is like a dog who only bites if one draws back; and comes to lick the

## THE MENACE

hand which is raised to smite him. If you beat him with a stick, he is never quite sure you may not have the right to do so. He may at first have thought you of no particular importance, but put on a haughty air, and you immediately become a great personage who prefers to affect an air of simplicity. The Orient never doubts: anything is possible there. The simple monk may very well be a king's son, as in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Besides, do not the princes of Europe themselves travel in a frock-coat and a round hat?

## IX

### THE COAST OF PALESTINE

I hailed with delight the appearance, for which I had hoped so much, of the coast of Asia. It was so long since I had seen a mountain. The misty coolness of the landscape; the brightness of the painted houses, and the Turkish pavilions mirrored in the blue water; the different ridges of tableland which rise so boldly from the sea to the sky; the sharp summit of Carmel; the square enclosure and the lofty dome of its celebrated monastery, lighted up in the distance by that radiant cherry hue, which always seems to recall that cool dawn of which Homer sings, and at the feet of these mountains, Kaiffa, which we had already passed, opposite Saint John of Acre at the other end of the bay, off which our ship had anchored—it was a vision full at once of magnificence and beauty. The sea, with hardly a ripple, spreading like oil towards the shore where the thin fringe of the waves broke in gentle surf, struggling to compete in blueness with the ether which was already vibrating with the fire of the sun, though the sun could not yet be seen—

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such a sight one never sees in Egypt, with its low coasts and its horizons always spoiled by dust. At last the sun appeared: before us the town of Acre, coming out into the sea upon its promontory of sand, was clearly defined, with its white cupolas, its walls, its terraced houses, and its square battlemented tower which was once the abode of the terrible Djczzar Pasha against whom Napoleon fought.

We had cast anchor not far from the shore. We had to await a visit from the health authorities before the boats could come out to us with supplies of fresh water and fruits. But we could not go ashore, unless we wished to stay in quarantine at the town.

Immediately the doctor's boat had come to confirm the fact that we were sick, as having come from Egypt, the little boats from the town were permitted to come and bring us the refreshments which we awaited, and to take our money with all due precaution. So, for the barrels of water, the melons and the pomegranates which were handed over to us, we had to pour our *ghazis*, our *piastres* and our *paras* into bowls of vinegary water which were placed within our reach.

Thus revictualled, we forgot our domestic troubles. Since I could not go ashore for a few hours only, and as I did not wish to stay in the town, I could see no purpose in sending my letter to the Pasha, for it might still serve me as a recommendation at any other part of that ancient coast of Phœnicia which was under the government of the Pasha of Acre. This town, which the ancients called Ako, or the *Strait*, and which the Arabs call Akka, was called Ptolemais up to the time of the Crusades.

We set sail again, and thereafter our voyage was all enjoyment. We kept a quarter of a league's distance from the coast of Syria, and the sea, always clear and

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blue, reflected, like a lake, the beautiful range of mountains which stretches from Carmel to the Lebanon. Six leagues after Acre came Sour, formerly Tyre, with Alexander's jetty joining to the shore the island on which the ancient city was built, that city which held out so long against the siege he laid.

Six leagues farther still was Saida, the ancient Sidon, with its cluster of white houses gathered like a flock at the feet of the mountain in which the Druses live. These famous shores have very little to show in the way of ruins of wealthy Phœnicia, but what can towns which have been entirely given over to trade be expected to leave? Their splendour has passed like a shadow and like dust, and the biblical curse has been completely realised, like everything else which the wisdom of the nations thinks fit to deny.

However, when a man is about to reach his goal, he wearies of everything, even of beautiful shores and azure waves. At last we reached the promontory of Raz-Beyrouth and its grey rocks, with the snow-covered peak of Sannin standing above it. The coast is arid; the slightest details of the rocks carpeted with reddish moss are to be seen in the rays of the burning sun. We stayed close to the shore, turned into the gulf, and there found a complete change—a landscape full of freshness, shade and silence. Beyrouth, at a calm period, looks like the Alps seen from the bosom of a Swiss lake. Here Europe and Asia seem to mingle in a sweet caress; to every pilgrim who has grown weary of sun and dust, it is like a maritime oasis where, with delight, he sees clouds before the mountains—clouds which in our northern climes seem sad and gloomy, but which to the traveller in the South seem so desirable and so beautiful.

Oh, blessed clouds! clouds of my native land! I

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had forgotten your benefits. And the Eastern sun gives you so many added charms. In the morning you are so exquisite of hue, half pink, half blue, like mythological clouds from whose bosom I always expect to see smiling divinities appear. In the evening those marvellous fires, those empurpled vaults, which crumble and change into violet flocks, while the sky changes from sapphire to emerald, a phenomenon so rarely seen in Northern lands.

As we proceeded, the green acquired other shades, and the dark colour of the soil and the buildings added still further to the freshness of the countryside. The town, at the end of the gulf, seemed smothered in foliage, and, instead of that mass of whitewashed houses which makes up the majority of Arab cities, I might have been looking at a number of delightful villas spread over a space of two leagues. The buildings, it is true, became closer, at a definite point marked by towers round and square; but that only seemed to be the central quarter of the town, denoted by flags of all colours.

However, instead of approaching, as I had expected, the narrow roads crowded with small ships, we crossed the gulf diagonally, and went to moor by an island surrounded by rocks, where a few simple buildings and a yellow flag indicated the quarantine station which, for the moment, was the only place allowed to us.

### X

#### QUARANTINE

Captain Nicholas and his crew had become very pleasant and full of consideration for me. They passed their period of quarantine on board, but a boat,

## QUARANTINE

sent by the health authorities, came to take the passengers to the island, which indeed, when I saw it more closely, was rather a peninsula. A narrow creek among the rocks, shaded by trees of a great age, ended at a staircase leading to a kind of cloister whose pointed arches rested upon stone pillars and supported a cedar roof as in the monasteries at Rome. All around the sea was breaking on rocks carpeted by kelp, and the only thing needed to recall the first act of Maturin's *Bertram* was a choir of monks and a storm.

There we had to wait some time for the visit of the *nazir*, or Turkish director, who was finally good enough to admit us to the delights of his domain. Other monastic-looking buildings succeeded the first which, open on all sides, served for the disinfection of suspect merchandise. At the end of the promontory, an isolated pavilion, looking out upon the sea, was given us to live in; it was the place usually provided for Europeans. The galleries which we had left on our right were occupied by Arab families, camped out, so to speak, in huge rooms which served both as stables and as a place in which to live. There, the captive horses neighed, dromedaries passed through the bars their wry necks and their shaggy heads; farther on, the tribesmen, squatting around their fire, turned with a ferocious air when they saw us near the door. We had the right to walk about over two acres of land sown with barley and planted with mulberry-trees, and even to bathe in the sea under the watchful eye of a keeper.

Once accustomed to this wild seascape, I found my stay there delightful. There was rest and shade and a series of views which might suffice to set any man dreaming the most wonderful dreams. On the one hand, the dark mountains of Lebanon, with their

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many-hued summits, with occasional white splashes which were really Maronite and Druse villages, whose monasteries stood out upon a landscape that stretched for eight leagues. On the other hand, at one of the jutting corners of that snow-covered range which comes to an end at Cape Boutron, the amphitheatre of Beyrouth, crowned by a pine wood planted by the Emir Fakardin to arrest the invasion of the desert sands. Crenellated towers, castles, manors pierced by pointed arches, built of a reddish stone, give this country a feudal and, at the same time, a European aspect which recalls the miniatures of the knightly manuscripts of the Middle Ages. Frankish ships, which the narrow harbour of Beyrouth was too small to hold, lie at anchor in the roads and give life to the picture.

This quarantine which we had to undergo at Beyrouth was no great hardship, and our days were spent either dreaming under the shade of the sycamores and fig-trees, or in climbing up picturesque roads which almost surrounded a natural pool in which the sea waves broke softly. It was a place which made me think of the rocky grottos of the daughters of Nerea. We spent all the middle of the day there, away from the others who were in quarantine, lying on the green seaweed, or fighting lazily the foaming surf. At night we were locked up in our pavilion, and there the mosquitoes and other insects made our leisure less enjoyable. The closed tunics with a mask of gauze, which I mentioned before, were then of great assistance. Our food consisted solely of bread and cheese, supplied by the canteen, with the eggs and fowls brought by the mountain people. In addition, every morning, sheep were killed, and their flesh sold to us at a piastre a pound. There was also



## QUARANTINE

Cyprus wine at about half a piastre a bottle, which supplied us with a feast worthy of any European table, though I must admit that one soon tires of this strong wine if it has to be taken as a regular beverage, and I preferred the golden wine of Lebanon, which, as regards dryness and strength, is not unlike Madeira.

One day Captain Nicolas, with two of his sailors and the cabin boy, came to pay us a visit. We had once more become good friends, and he had brought the *badji*, who grasped me by the hand with great enthusiasm, fearing perhaps that I should make a complaint about him when I was once free and in Beyrouth. I, too, was full of cordiality. We dined together, and the captain invited me to come and stay with him if I ever went to Taraboulous.

After dinner we went for a walk along the shore; he took me aside, and pointed out to me the slave and the Armenian chatting together, rather lower down, and nearer to the sea than we were. A few words of mingled Frank and Greek made me realise his meaning, but I repulsed it with marked incredulity. He shook his head, and soon afterwards got back into his longboat, taking an affectionate leave of me. Captain Nicolas, I said to myself, has still not forgotten my refusal to exchange my slave for his cabin boy. But the suspicion stayed in my mind, attacking my pride if nothing else.

You will easily understand that a certain coldness had resulted from the violent scene upon the ship between the slave and myself. One of those *irreparable* words of which the author of *Adolphe* speaks had been spoken between us; the epithet *giaour* had deeply wounded me. So, I said to myself, there was not much difficulty in persuading her that I had no rights over her; moreover, whether from her own opinion or from

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somebody else's, she feels herself humiliated to belong to a race which, according to Mussulman ideas, is inferior. The degraded condition of the Christian populations in the East really redounds upon the European himself. He is feared on the coast because of that show of power which comes from the passage of ships, but in the countries of the interior where this woman had always lived, the prejudice remains untouched.

However, I found it hard to believe that this simple soul was capable of dissimulation; the religious sentiment which was so pronounced in her would itself preclude anything so despicable. But, on the other hand, I could not hide from myself the advantages which the Armenian had over me. He was still quite young, handsome in the Asiatic way, with the strong pure features of those born at the cradle of the world. He made one think of some delightful girl who had taken it into her head to disguise herself as a man, and even his costume, with the exception of the head-dress, hardly destroyed this illusion.

There was I, like Arnolphe, on the watch, realising that I was doubly ridiculous, for I filled the extra part of *a master*. It might be that I was being both deceived and robbed, and I repeated, like the jealous husband in the comedy: What a heavy burden is the care of a woman! Besides, I said to myself almost at once, there is nothing surprising about it; he distracts her and amuses her with his tales; he pays her a thousand little compliments, whilst I, when I try to speak to her in her own language, must cut a figure as sorry as that of an Englishman, a man of the North, cold and heavy, when he is dealing with a woman of my own country. The Levantines have a warm expansive manner which must really be seducing.

From that moment, I must own, I thought I saw

## QUARANTINE

claspings of hands, and tender words which my presence could not even prevent. I thought about it a long time and then decided to take a strong line.

"My dear fellow," I said to the Armenian, "what was it you did in Egypt?"

"I was secretary to Toussoun Bey. I used to translate French newspapers and books for him, and I wrote his letters to Turkish officials. He died suddenly and I was dismissed. That is the situation."

"And now what do you propose to do?"

"I hope to enter the service of the Pasha of Beyrouth. I know his treasurer: he is one of my own people."

"Do you never think of getting married?"

"I have no money for a dowry, and no family will give me a wife without one."

Come, said I to myself after a silence, let us show how magnanimous we are by making two people happy.

I felt myself ennobled by the thought. In this way I should have freed a slave and brought about a decent marriage. I should be father and benefactor in one. I seized the Armenian's hands and said to him: "She pleases you . . . marry her, she is yours!"

I should have liked to have the whole world for witness of this moving scene, this patriarchal picture: the Armenian astonished, confused by so much magnanimity; the slave seated near us, still ignorant of the subject of our conversation, but, it seemed to me, already uneasy and preoccupied.

The Armenian lifted his arms to heaven as if my proposition astounded him. "What!" said I to him, "wretched man, you hesitate! . . . You seduce a woman who belongs to another, you turn her aside from the path of duty, and then you will not be bothered with her when she is given to you?"

But the Armenian did not understand a word of my

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reproaches. He expressed his astonishment by a series of vigorous protests. He had never had the slightest idea of any of the things I was thinking. He was so unhappy at such a suggestion, that he hastened to tell the slave and make her give evidence to prove his sincerity. Learning at the same time what I had said, she appeared to be hurt, especially at the suggestion that she would give a thought to a simple *raya*, a servant sometimes of the Turks, sometimes of the Franks, a kind of *yaoudi*.

So Captain Nicolas had led me into all sorts of foolish ideas. . . . It was clear that the tricky character of the Greeks was responsible.

## PART VII

### THE MOUNTAIN

#### I

FATHER PLANCHET

WHEN we had come out of quarantine, I rented an apartment for three months in the house of some Maronite Christians about half a league from the town. Most of these houses, situated amid gardens, standing in rows along terraces planted with mulberry-trees, look like little manor-houses of the feudal period, solidly built of brownish stone with loop-holes and arches. Outside staircases lead to the different floors, each of which has a terrace of its own, until you reach that which is at the top of the whole house, where the families gather in the evening to enjoy the view over the gulf. On every side was thick glossy verdure, with only the regular hedges of noplas to mark the divisions. The first days we were there I gave myself up completely to the enjoyment of the coolness and shade. Everywhere around us there seemed to be life and comfort; the women well dressed, beautiful and unveiled, going and coming with those heavy pitchers which they fill at the cisterns, and carry gracefully upon their shoulders. Our hostess, who wore upon her head a kind of cone draped with a shawl, which, with the tresses of long hair adorned with sequins, gave her the air of an Assyrian queen, was only the wife of a tailor who kept a shop in the Beyrouth

## THE MOUNTAIN

bazaar. Her two daughters and the younger children lived on the first floor, and we occupied the second.

The slave very quickly made friends with this family and, nonchalantly seated upon the rugs, she regarded herself as surrounded by inferiors, and insisted upon being waited upon, though I did all I could to prevent the poor people from waiting upon her. But it was convenient to have somewhere to leave her in security when I went to the town. I was expecting letters which did not arrive, for the French postal service is so bad in this part of the world that newspapers and parcels are always two months late. These circumstances caused me much sorrow and made me a prey to sombre thoughts. One morning I woke up rather late, still half plunged in the illusions of dream. A priest was seated at my bed-side, looking at me with a kind of compassion.

"How do you feel, sir?" he said in a melancholy tone.

"Quite well; you must forgive me, but I am only half awake and . . ."

"Don't disturb yourself! Be calm! Collect your thoughts, and remember that the moment is near."

"What moment?"

"The final hour, so terrible for one who is not at peace with God."

"Oh dear, what *is* the matter?"

"I am here ready to take account of your last wishes."

"Well! I must say . . ." I cried, "this is too much of a good thing! Who are you?"

"I am Father Planchet."

"Father Planchet!"

"Of the Society of Jesus."

"But I don't know you!"

## FATHER PLANCHET

“Someone came to the monastery to tell me that a young American who was in danger of death would like to see me and leave some legacy to the community.”

“But I’m not an American! There is some mistake! Moreover, I’m not on my deathbed: see for yourself.”

I jumped quickly out of bed . . . a little anxious to convince myself that I really was quite well. At last Father Planchet realised that he had been misinformed. He made inquiries in the house, and learned that the American lived a little farther on. He took his leave, with a laugh at his mistake, and promised to come and see me on his way back, saying that he was delighted, thanks to this strange chance, to have become acquainted with me.”

When he came back, the slave was in my room, and I told him her story. “What!” said he. “How could you take this burden on your conscience? You have spoiled this woman’s life, and henceforth you will be responsible for everything that happens to her. Since you cannot take her to France, and doubtless you do not wish to marry her, what will become of her?”

“I will give her her liberty; that is the greatest good which any creature endowed with reason can demand.”

“It would have been better to leave her where she was; perhaps she would have found a good master, a husband. . . . How can you tell now into what abyss of evil-living she may fall when once she is left to her own devices? She knows nothing, and she refuses to be a servant. . . . Just think what it all means.”

In truth, I never had thought seriously about it. I asked Father Planchet’s advice.

“Possibly,” said he, “I may find a position and a future for her. There are some very pious ladies in the town who might make themselves responsible for her.”

## THE MOUNTAIN

I warned him of her extreme devotion to the Mussulman religion. He shook his head and began to talk to her.

Fundamentally, the woman possessed a religious sense developed rather by nature and in a general way than in any particular direction. Further, the sight of the Maronite population among whom we were living; the monasteries, whose bells we could hear ringing in the mountain; the frequent passing of Christian and Druse emirs on their way to Beyrouth, splendidly mounted, with magnificent weapons, with trains of horsemen and blacks bearing behind them their standards furled around lances: all this feudal pomp, which, indeed, astonished myself—it was so like a picture of the Crusades—had taught the poor slave that even in Turkish countries there could be power and dignity among those who were not Mussulmans.

Outward appearances always make the greatest impression upon women, especially ignorant and simple women. They often become the main cause of their sympathies and their convictions. When we went to Beyrouth, and she passed through the crowd of women without veils, wearing the *tantour* on their heads, a cornet of carved and gilded silver from which a gauze veil falls behind their heads, another fashion preserved since the Middle Ages; and haughty men with splendid weapons, whose red or striped turbans showed that they were not Mussulmans, she cried: "*What giaours!*" And this cry somewhat softened my resentment for her having abused me with that very word.

But something had to be done. The Maronites, our hosts, who did not care much for her behaviour, and besides were inclined to judge her from the



## FATHER PLANCHET

intolerant standpoint of a Catholic, said: "Sell her." They even proposed to find a Turk who would do the business for me. You will realise the reply I made to this hardly evangelical piece of advice.

I went to see Father Planchet at his monastery almost at the gates of Beyrouth. Attached to it was a school for Christian children, for which he was responsible. For some time we talked about M. de Lamartine, whom he had known and whose poetry he greatly admired. He complained of the trouble which he had had in getting permission from the Turkish authorities to enlarge the monastery. The uncompleted work gave evidence of a plan on the large scale, and a magnificent staircase in Cyprus marble led to still unfinished floors above. Catholic monasteries are free enough in the mountains; but at the gates of Beyrouth they were not allowed to put up buildings in too imposing a style, and the Jesuits had even been forbidden a real bell. They had supplied its place by an enormous cow bell, and this, changed from time to time, gradually acquired the airs of a church bell. The buildings, too, increased almost imperceptibly, for the Turkish eye was none too vigilant.

"We have to manœuvre a little," Father Planchet said to me. "We shall get there with patience."

He spoke with genuine kindness about the slave. But I was struggling with my own uncertainty. The letters I expected might arrive any day and change my decision. I was afraid that Father Planchet, out of pious self-deception, might be principally concerned in securing the honour of a conversion for his monastery, and that the fate of the poor girl might become all the worse later on.

One morning she came into my room, clapping her

## THE MOUNTAIN

hands and crying in terror: "*Durzi! Durzi! bandouguillah!*" (The Druses! the Druses! they're shooting!)

I could indeed hear shooting in the distance; but it was only a *fantasia* of some Albanians who were going to the mountain. I made inquiries and learned that the Druses had burned a village called Bethmeria, about four leagues away. Turkish troops were being sent, not against them, but to watch the movements of both parties, for there was still fighting about there.

I had gone to Beyrouth where I learned this news. It was very late when I returned, and I was told that a Christian prince or emir of one of the districts of the Lebanon was staying in the house. Learning that there was also a Frank from Europe in the house, he had wished to see me, and had waited a long time in my room, where he had left his weapons as a sign of confidence and friendship. The next day, the noise made by his followers woke me up early; there were six well-armed and magnificently mounted men with him. We soon made acquaintance, and the Prince suggested that I should go and spend a few days with him in the mountain. I wasted no time in accepting an invitation to study the life and customs of the strange people who lived there.

During this time I should have to find a suitable place for the slave, for it was impossible for me to take her with me. I was told of a girls' school, kept by a lady from Marseilles called Madame Carlès. It was the only school where French was taught. Madame Carlès was an excellent soul, who only asked three Turkish piastres a day for the board, food and instruction of the slave. Three days after I had put her in the house I had to set out for the mountain, and already she had settled down very well, and was delighted

## FATHER PLANCHET

to talk to the little girls whom her ideas and her stories greatly amused.

Madame Carlès took me aside, and said she did not despair of converting the slave. "This is how I go about it," she said to me. "I say to her: 'You see, my child, that all the good gods of every country are simply *the* Good God. Mohammed was a man of great merit . . . but Jesus Christ also was very good.'"

This gentle, tolerant method of bringing about a conversion seemed very acceptable to me. "You must not force her in any way," I said.

"Do not worry," said Madame Carlès; "she has already promised of her own free will to go to Mass with me next Sunday."

So you see I could not have left her in better hands, whether I sought to have her taught the principles of the Christian religion, or French—the French of Marseilles.

## II

### THE KIEF

Beyrouth, if you regard only the space enclosed within its ramparts, and the population there, hardly comes up to the ideas that Europe has of it, considered as the capital of the Lebanon. You must also take into account the hundreds of houses surrounded by gardens which fill the vast amphitheatre of which the port is only the centre—a scattered flock watched over by a tall square building, with Turkish sentinels, which is called the tower of Fakardin. I was living in one of those houses, spread out along the shore like the country-houses near Marseilles, and, ready to

## THE MOUNTAIN

set out for the mountain, I had only time enough to go to Beyrouth to get a horse, a mule, or perhaps a camel. I would have been satisfied with one of those fine donkeys with well set up heads and the colouring almost of a zebra, which in Egypt are preferred to horses. They gallop through the dust with untiring ardour, but in Syria these animals are not strong enough to climb the stony roads of Lebanon, though their race should be blessed among races, in that it was one such that served as a steed to the prophet Balaam and also to the Messiah.

I thought of all this as I went on foot to Beyrouth, about that time of day when, as the Italians say, nobody is to be seen out in the broad sunlight but *gli cani e gli Francesi*. Now this saying, so far as the dogs are concerned, has always seemed untrue to me, for when the hour of the siesta comes, the dogs are always ready enough to stretch themselves idly in the shade and are in no hurry to get a sunstroke. But a Frenchman ! Try to keep him on a divan or a rug the moment after any sort of business, desire or even simple curiosity has entered his head. The demon of the South seldom weighs heavily upon his chest, and it is not for him that the shapeless Smarra rolls the yellow eyeballs in his great dwarf's head.

So I crossed the plain at that hour which the peoples of the South consecrate to the siesta and the Turks to the *kief*. A man who wanders in such a way, when everybody is asleep, in the East runs a serious risk of exciting the same suspicions as a nocturnal vagabond would do with us; but the sentinels on the Fakardin tower only watched me with that compassionate attention which a soldier on watch accords to a belated passer-by. When the tower is passed, a fair-sized plain allows one to see at one glance the whole of the

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eastern tall profile of the town, whose walls and crenellated towers go down to the sea. It is still like an Arab town at the time of the Crusades; European influence is evidenced only by the flagstaffs of the consular offices which fly their flags on Sundays and feast days.

The Turkish government here as everywhere else, has set its personal and peculiar seal. The Pasha took it into his head to demolish a portion of the walls by the palace of Fakardin, and there to build one of those pavilions of painted wood in the Constantinople style which the Turks prefer to the most gorgeous palaces of stone or marble. Would you know why the Turks only live in wooden houses? why even the palaces of the sultans, although they have marble pillars, have only pinewood walls? It is, according to a notion peculiar to the house of Othman, because the house a man builds for himself should not last longer than he does; it is a tent set up upon a journey, a temporary shelter, wherein man must not try to fight against destiny by leaving permanent traces of his passage, by endeavouring to consummate that uneasy marriage between family and the earth, after which the Christian peoples are always striving.

The palace forms a right angle with the city gate, a dark, cool passage which gives a welcome respite from the burning sun reflected by the sands of the plain which has just been crossed. A fine stone fountain shaded by a magnificent sycamore, the grey domes and graceful minarets of a mosque, a new bath-house built in the Moorish style—these are the first things the traveller sees when he enters Beyrouth, and they seem to promise him a calm and pleasant sojourn there. But when he goes farther, the walls become higher and seem gloomy and claustral.

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But why not go to the bath during these hours of intense and depressing heat which I should not enjoy if I went through the deserted streets? I was thinking about it, when I noticed a blue curtain before the door, and this told me that at this time only women were allowed to enter. Men have only the morning and evening for themselves . . . and woe betide him who should *lose himself* beneath a dais or a mattress at the time when one sex should take the place of the other. In truth, nobody but a European would be capable of thinking of such a thing: it would be too much for any Mussulman mind.

I had never gone into Beyrouth at this undue hour before, and I felt like that man in *The Thousand and One Nights* who went into a city of the magi, the people of which were turned into stone. Everybody was asleep: the sentinels at the gate; the donkeymen waiting for the ladies in the square; and the ladies themselves probably in the upper galleries of the bath; the date and melon sellers near the fountain; the *cafedji* and all his customers in the café; the *hamal*, or porter, with his head resting on his load; the camel-driver beside his kneeling camel, and the tall devils of Albanians who formed the bodyguard before the Pasha's seraglio—all were sleeping the sleep of innocence, leaving the town abandoned.

It was at such an hour and during such a slumber that three hundred Druses one day seized Damascus. They had entered one by one, mingled with the crowd of country-people who fill the bazaars and squares in the morning, then they had pretended to go to sleep like the rest; but their groups, cleverly distributed, simultaneously seized the principal posts, while the main body pillaged the rich bazaars and set fire to them. The inhabitants, thus suddenly aroused, thought

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they were dealing with an army, and barricaded themselves in their houses, so that at the end of an hour the three hundred horsemen were able to go back, laden with booty, to their impregnable retreats in the Lebanon.

Such is the risk run by a town where everybody goes to sleep in broad daylight. But in Beyrouth the European colony does not surrender itself completely to the pleasures of the siesta. As I walked towards the right, I soon noticed a certain animation in a street that leads to the square. The penetrating odour of something frying revealed the neighbourhood of a *trattoria*, and the sign of the famous Battista soon met my eyes. I was only too well acquainted with the type of those hotels which, in the Orient, are intended for European travellers ever to have dreamed of taking advantage of the hospitality of Master Battista, the only Frank among the innkeepers of Beyrouth. The English have spoiled these places everywhere, and they are usually far more modest in their accommodation than in their prices. But at this moment I thought there would be no harm done in dining there, if they would condescend to admit me. Taking the risk, I went in.

### III

#### THE TABLE D'HÔTE

On the first floor I found myself upon a terrace surrounded by buildings and overlooked by the windows of the courtyard. A great white and red *tendido* overspread a long table set out in the European style, and most of the chairs were tilted to denote places still

## THE MOUNTAIN

unoccupied. On the door of a room at the end, on the same level as the terrace, I read these words: "*Qui si paga 60 piastres per giorno*" (Here the rate is 60 piastres a day).

Some Englishmen were smoking cigars in this room, waiting for the bell to ring. Soon two women came down, and the company sat down to table. Near me was an Englishman of dignified demeanour. He was served by a young man with a complexion of copper, who wore a costume of white dimity, and silver earrings. I decided that this must be some nabob who had an Indian in his service. But this personage very soon addressed me, which surprised me a little, for the English never speak to people who have not been introduced to them. This man, however, was not an ordinary Englishman. He was a missionary of the London Missionary Society whose business it is to effect conversions for the English, and it was often his duty to disseminate the usual *cant* the better to draw souls into his net. He had just arrived from the Mountain, and I was delighted to have the chance of obtaining some information from him before I went there myself. I asked for news of the alarm which had just disturbed the outskirts of Beyrouth.

"It was nothing," said he; "the affair failed."

"What affair?"

"The fighting between the Maronites and the Druses in the mixed villages."

"So you have just come from the country where the fighting was?"

"Yes, I went to make peace—to make peace in the canton of Bekfaya, because England has many friends in the mountain."

"Are the Druses friendly with England?"

"Oh yes. The poor people are very unfortunate:



## THE TABLE D'HÔTE

they are killed; they are burned; their women are disembowelled; their trees and harvests are destroyed."

"You will forgive me, but in France we always imagine that it is they, on the contrary, who oppress the Christians."

"Oh Heavens, no! Poor creatures! They are wretched tillers of the earth who mean no harm; but your Capuchins, your Jesuits, your Lazarites add fire to the flame. They excite the Maronites, who are much more numerous, against them. The Druses defend themselves as best they can, and, if it were not for England, they would have been utterly destroyed before this. England always takes the side of the weaker; England is always for those who suffer. . . ."

"Yes," said I, "you are a great people. So you succeeded in putting an end to the disturbances which have been taking place these last few days?"

"Oh certainly. A few Englishmen like myself were there; we told the Druses that England would not abandon them; that justice should be done them. They set fire to the village, and then went home quite quietly. They accepted more than three hundred Bibles from us, and we converted many of those excellent fellows."

"But I do not understand," I said to the reverend gentleman, "how anybody can be converted to the Anglican religion. Surely it would be necessary to become an Englishman for that?"

"Oh no . . . they can belong to the society, and then they are protected by England, but, of course, they can't become Englishmen."

"And who is the head of this religion?"

"Her Gracious Majesty, the Queen of England."

"How delightful to have a lady Pope! I give you my word I am almost ready to make up my mind to join you."

## THE MOUNTAIN

"Oh you French! You are always joking . . . you are not good friends of England."

"Yet one of your missionaries," I said, suddenly remembering something that happened when I was very young, "once tried to convert me. I have even kept the Bible he gave me, but I still find it difficult to understand how you can make an Anglican out of a Frenchman."

"There are a good number of Anglicans among you all the same . . . and if, when you were a child, you received the word of truth, it may still ripen in you later."

I made no attempt to undeceive the reverend gentleman, for when one is travelling one becomes very tolerant, especially when guided only by curiosity and the desire to observe local customs; but I realised that the fact that I had formerly known an English missionary gave me a title to the confidence of my neighbour at table.

The two English ladies whom I had noticed were sitting on the left of the clergyman, and I soon discovered that one was his wife and the other his sister-in-law. No English missionary ever travels without his family. This one appeared to be travelling in style, and occupied the most important rooms in the hotel. When we rose from table, he went to his own room for a moment and soon returned with a kind of album which he held out to me triumphantly. "Here you are," said he; "here is the list of all the abjurations which I secured in my last effort on behalf of our holy religion."

A number of declarations, signatures and Arabic seals did, in fact, cover the pages of the book. I noticed that this register was kept in two columns, one of which gave a list of the presents and sums of

## THE TABLE D'HÔTE

money the Anglican neophytes received. Some had only received a gun, a shawl or an ornament for their wives. I asked the reverend gentleman if the missionary society gave him so much a head for each conversion. He admitted it quite openly; it seemed natural to him, and to me as well, that a journey so expensive and full of danger should be well remunerated. I realised also, from the details he added, what an advantage the wealth of English agents gives them compared with those of other nations.

We sat down upon a divan in the smoking-room, and the clergyman's dark servant knelt before him to light his narghile. I asked if this young man was not an Indian, but he was a Parsi from the neighbourhood of Bagdad, one of the most striking specimens of conversion the reverend gentleman had yet secured, and he was taking him back to England as a sample.

In the meantime, the Parsi acted as his servant as well as his disciple; he doubtless brushed his master's clothes with fervour, and polished his boots with compunction. But in my heart I was rather sorry for him for having given up the worship of Ormuzd for the modest occupation of an evangelical lackey. I had hoped to be introduced to the ladies, who had gone to their own apartment, but on this point the reverend gentleman maintained all the reserve of the English. While we were still talking, we heard the sound of a military band. "The Pasha is having a reception," the Englishman told me. "It is a deputation of Maronite sheiks who are coming to make their complaints. People like them are always complaining, but the Pasha turns a deaf ear."

"When I hear the band, I can well believe that," said I. "I never heard such a horrible noise."

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"But it is your national anthem they are playing; it is the *Marseillaise*."

"I would never have believed it."

"Well, I know it, because I hear it every morning and every evening, and I have been told that is what they think they are playing."

By paying more attention, I did in fact succeed in picking out a few notes, though they were lost in the host of variations in which Turkish music delights.

The town certainly seemed to have waked up again; the sea-breeze of the afternoon was softly fluttering the canvas stretched over the hotel terrace. I said good-bye to the clergyman, thanking him for the politeness he had shown me—a thing rare in any Englishman, because of that social prejudice which puts him on his guard against anyone or anything he does not know. It seems to me that therein lies an evidence if not of egotism, at least of a certain lack of generosity.

When I left the hotel, I was surprised to find that I had to pay only ten piastres for my dinner. Signor Battista took me aside and reproached me in a friendly way for not having come to stay at his hotel. I pointed out to him the notice which announced that no guests were taken for less than sixty piastres a day, which would bring up the expense to eighteen hundred piastres a month. "*Ah! corpo di me!*" he cried. "*Questo è per gli Inglesi che hanno molto moneta, e che sono tutti eretici! . . . ma, per gli Francesi, e altri Romani, è soltanto cinque franchi!*" (That is for the English who have plenty of money and are all heretics; Frenchmen and other Romans only pay five francs.)

That was a very different matter, I thought, and congratulated myself the more on not belonging to the Anglican religion, since the innkeepers of Syria are animated by sentiments so Catholic and so Roman.

## THE PALACE OF THE PASHA

### IV

#### THE PALACE OF THE PASHA

Signor Battista capped his good offices by promising to find me a horse for the following morning. Now that I was satisfied upon this point, there was nothing else for me to do but take a walk in the town, and I began by crossing the square to see what was happening at the Pasha's castle. There was a great crowd there, and in the middle of it the Maronite sheiks proceeding two by two, like a procession of supplication, the head of which had already entered the courtyard of the palace. Their ample turbans, red or parti-coloured, their *machlahs* and caftans with gold and silver trimmings, their shining weapons—all that outward splendour which in other countries of the Orient is confined to the Turks—gave this procession a very imposing appearance. I went after them into the palace, where the band was still transfiguring the *Marseillaise*, with the aid of fifes, triangles, and cymbals.

The courtyard is formed by the walls of the old palace of Fakardin. Traces of Renaissance work are still to be seen, for the Druse prince, after his journey to Europe, thought highly of it. The traveller should feel no astonishment at hearing the name of Fakardin, which is pronounced Fakr-el-Din in Arabic, everywhere in this country. He is the hero of the Lebanon, and also the first Asiatic sovereign who condescended to visit our Northern climates. He was welcomed at the Court of the Medicis as the revelation of a fact then almost unimaginable, that in the land of the Saracens there existed a people devoted to Europe, either by sympathy or religion.

## THE MOUNTAIN

At Florence Fakardin was accounted a philosopher, the heir to the Greek sciences of the Later Empire, preserved through Arabic translations, which saved so many precious works, and handed down their benefits to us. In France people thought they saw in him a descendant of some old crusaders who, at the time of Saint Louis, had taken refuge in the Lebanon, and even tried to make out from the very name of the Druse people an alliterative connection which proved him to be a descendant of a certain Comte de Dreux. Fakardin accepted all these theories with the prudent and cunning indifference of the Levantine, for he needed the help of Europe in his struggle against the Sultan.

At Florence he was supposed to be a Christian; perhaps he actually became one, as, in our own time, the Emir Bechir did, whose family succeeded that of Fakardin in the sovereignty of the Lebanon; but he was always a Druse—that is to say, the representative of a strange religion, which, formed out of the remnants of all the religions that have gone before it, allows its faithful to accept temporarily every possible form of worship, as the Egyptian initiates used to do. Fundamentally, the religion of the Druses is nothing more or less than a kind of freemasonry, to use a modern term.

For a while Fakardin represented our ideal of Hiram, the ancient king of the Lebanon, the friend of Solomon, the hero of the mystical associations. Master of all the coasts of ancient Phœnicia and Palestine, he tried to make all Syria into an independent kingdom, but the support for which he hoped from the monarchs of Europe was not forthcoming, and his scheme failed. Now his memory has remained for Lebanon an ideal of glory and power; the remains

## THE PALACE OF THE PASHA

of his buildings, ruined more by war than by time, are great enough to rival the works of the Romans. The Italian art which he had summoned to adorn his palaces and cities left a series of ornaments, statues and colonnades behind it which the Mussulmans, when they came back as conquerors, hastened to destroy, in their astonishment at seeing the sudden renaissance of those pagan arts which they had laid waste in conquests years before.

In the very place where these frail marvels existed for too few years, where, from afar, the breath of the Renaissance sowed fresh seeds of Greek and Roman antiquity, the Pasha has set up his timber pavilion. The procession of Maronites had halted outside the windows to await the governor's good pleasure. They were soon introduced.

When the vestibule was opened, I saw, among the secretaries and officials who stood about the hall, the Armenian who had been my travelling companion on the *Santa-Barbara*. He was wearing new clothes, a silver writing case was thrust into his girdle, and in his hand he was holding a number of parchments and pamphlets. In the countries of the Arab stories one must never be astonished to find some poor devil whom one had lost from sight holding a good position at the Court. The Armenian recognised me immediately, and seemed delighted to see me. As a Turkish official, he wore the costume of the reform, and he already expressed himself with a certain air of dignity.

"I am glad," I said to him, "to find you in a becoming occupation. You seem to me to have become a person of importance, and I am only sorry that I have no favours to ask."

"Indeed," said he, "I do not yet enjoy much credit, but I am entirely at your service."

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While we were talking behind one of the pillars of the vestibule, the procession of sheiks was making its way to the Pasha's audience chamber.

"What are you doing here?" I asked the Armenian.

"They use me as a translator. Yesterday the Pasha asked me to make a Turkish version of this pamphlet."

I glanced at the pamphlet. It had been printed at Paris, and was a report by M. Crémieux upon the affair of the Damascus Jews. Europe had forgotten this unfortunate episode of the murder of Father Thomas, which was laid at the door of the Jews. The Pasha evidently felt the need of enlightenment about the business, though it had been finished and done with five years before. There, assuredly, was conscientiousness.

The Armenian was further given the task of translating Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*, and a manual of the Paris National Guard. The latter he found very difficult, and asked me to help him with certain expressions which he did not understand. It was the Pasha's intention to create a National Guard for Beyrouth; there is already one at Cairo and many other towns in the Orient. As for the *Esprit des lois*, I imagine that it had been chosen for its title, in the belief that it contained police regulations applicable to any country. The Armenian had already translated part of it. He found it agreeable and simple in style, and it doubtless lost very little in translation.

I asked him if he could get me into the audience chamber when the Maronite sheiks were received by the Pasha, but nobody was allowed in without showing the safe-conduct which had been given to each of them, simply that they might see the Pasha, for Maronite or Druse sheiks are not ordinarily allowed



## THE PALACE OF THE PASHA

to enter Beyruth. Their vassals are allowed to enter freely, but for themselves there are severe penalties if, by chance, they are found inside the town. The Turks are afraid of their influence upon the population, or of the quarrels which might arise in the streets from the meeting of chiefs who are always armed, accompanied by a numerous train, and ever ready to fight about a point of precedence. I must admit that the law is only strictly observed at a time of disturbance.

Moreover, the Armenian told me that the audience with the Pasha consisted of nothing more than the reception of the sheiks, whom he invited to sit down on divans around the hall; that slaves brought each of them a long pipe and then served coffee, after which the Pasha listened to their complaints, and invariably replied that their opponents had already been to complain to him in identical terms; that he would consider carefully the rights and the wrongs of the case, and that they should have every confidence in the paternal government of His Highness, before whom all the religions and peoples of the Empire would always have equal rights. So far as diplomatic procedure is concerned, the Turks have nothing to learn from Europe.

It must be admitted that the position of a Pasha in this country is no easy one. Everybody knows the diversity of the races who live upon the long ranges of the Lebanon and Carmel, from which they dominate, as from a fortress, all the rest of Syria. The Maronites recognise the spiritual authority of the Pope, and this gives them the protection of France and Austria; the uniate Greeks, more in numbers but not so important, because, speaking generally, they live on the plains, have the support of Russia; the Druses,

## THE MOUNTAIN

Ansaries and Metualis, who belong to creeds or sects rejected by orthodox Mohammedans, offer England a field of action which the other Powers, only too generously, leave entirely to her.

## V

### THE BAZAARS—THE HARBOUR

I left the courtyard of the palace, passing through a closely-packed crowd which seemed to be attracted by nothing more than curiosity. When I entered the dark streets formed by the lofty buildings of Beyrouth, built like fortresses and connected occasionally by vaulted passages, I found the town again in movement, now that the hour of the siesta was over. Mountain folk crowded the huge bazaar, which takes up the whole of the centre quarters, and is divided into departments for food-stuffs and merchandise. The presence of women in some of the shops is an unusual thing in the Orient, and is only to be explained by the scarcity of people of Mussulman origin in Beyrouth.

Nothing could be more entertaining than to go through these long rows of stalls, protected by different coloured shades which do not prevent a few rays of the sun from playing upon the fruits and vegetables so marvellously coloured; or, farther on, from making the embroidery sparkle upon the rich garments that hang outside every old clothes shop. I was very anxious to add to my costume an item of adornment which is only found in Syria. This consists in draping the forehead and temples with a gold-striped silk handkerchief, which is called *caffieh*. It is kept on the head by tying around it a string of twisted horsehair,

## THE BAZAARS

and its purpose is to preserve the ears and neck from the draughts which are so dangerous in a mountainous country. I was sold a very gorgeous one for forty piastres, and after going to try it on at a barber's, I thought I looked like an Eastern king.

These handkerchiefs are made at Damascus; some come from Broussa, and some also from Lyons. Long silken cords, knotted and tufted, fall gracefully over the back and shoulders, and satisfy that masculine coquetry which is so natural in a country where one can still put on a handsome dress. It may seem childish, but I imagine that dignity of outward appearance has its influence upon the thoughts and actions of life. In the Orient there is a certain masculine assurance to be observed which is undoubtedly connected with the custom of wearing weapons at the girdle; a man feels that he must be both respectable and respected at all times, and rudeness and quarrels are uncommon, because everybody knows quite well that there may be bloodshed for the least of insults.

I have never seen such handsome children as those who were running about and playing in the most beautiful avenue in the bazaar. Laughing, slender maidens crowded around elegant marble fountains in the Moorish style, and, in due time, went away, bearing on their heads large vessels of ancient shape. In this country many red heads are to be seen, whose shade, darker than with us, has something of purple or of scarlet about it. This colour is considered so beautiful in Syria, that many women tint their fair or black hair with henna, which everywhere else is used only to redden the soles of the feet, the nails and palms of the hands.

There were people selling sherbets and ices at the various places where the lanes meet, making these

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beverages with snow gathered at the summit of Sannin. A gorgeous café at the central point of the bazaar, mainly frequented by soldiers, also supplied iced and perfumed drinks. I stayed there some time, never becoming weary of the movement of this active crowd, which brought together in a single place the varied costumes of the mountains. Besides, there was a certain element of comedy in watching, in the bargaining between buyers and sellers, the balancing of the jewelled cornets, more than a foot high, which the Druse and Maronite women wear upon their heads, and from which there falls over their faces a long veil which they throw back whenever they feel so inclined. The position of this ornament makes them look like the fabulous unicorns which support the royal arms of England. Their outer garments are invariably black or white.

The principal mosque of the city, which is in one of the streets in the bazaar, is an ancient church of the crusaders and the tomb of a Breton knight is still preserved there. Leaving this quarter and going in the direction of the harbour there is a broad street entirely given over to European trade. Here, *Marseilles* competes fairly successfully with *London*. On the right is the quarter of the Greeks, full of cafés and taverns, where this people's taste for the arts is manifested by a multitude of coloured wood engravings, which enliven the walls with the principal scenes in the life of *Napoleon* and the revolution of 1830. In order to contemplate this museum more at my leisure, I called for a bottle of *Cyprus* wine, and this was brought to where I was sitting, though I was asked to keep it hidden in the shadow of the table. There is no need to scandalise any *Mussulmans* who might happen to pass with the sight of someone openly drink-

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ing wine. But *aqua vitae*, which is the same as anisette, is consumed quite publicly.

The Greek quarter is joined to the harbour by a street in which the bankers and money-changers live. High stone walls, scarcely pierced by a few windows or gratings, surround and hide courtyards and rooms built in the Venetian style. They are a last remnant of the splendour which Beyroutb owed for a long time to the government of Druse emirs and their commercial relations with Europe. Most of the Consulates are in this quarter, and I went hastily through it. I was in a hurry to reach the harbour that I might abandon myself completely to the enjoyment of the splendid sight which there awaited me.

How exquisite is the natural beauty, the ineffable grace of these cities of the Orient, built upon the sea-shore, with their vivid pictures of life, wherein appear the most beautiful of all the peoples of humanity, gorgeous costumes, and boats and ships passing one another upon the azure waves. . . . How shall I describe the impression they cause upon every dreamer, though it is but the realisation of a feeling that has been felt before? We have read about it in books, we have admired it in paintings, especially those old Italian paintings which date from the period of the maritime power of the Venetians and Genoese. The surprising thing is, that the place itself so closely corresponds to the idea that has been formed of it. We push our way through this brightly coloured crowd, which seems to go back for two centuries—as if our minds were climbing back through the ages; as if the glorious past of bygone days reproduced itself for a moment. Are we, we say to ourselves, really the children of a serious country, of a frock-coated age which seems to be wearing mourning for the ages which

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have gone before it? Well now we ourselves are changed, we pose and look on, at one and the same time, like Joseph Vernet's sailors.

I went and sat down in a café, built upon a kind of stage supported as upon piles by pillars driven into the seashore. Through the cracks in the planks I could see the greenish water beating on the shore beneath my feet. Sailors of every country, mountaineers, Bedouins in their white robes, Maltese and a few piratical looking Greeks, smoke and chat around me; two or three young *cafédjis* stand by and occasionally refill with a foaming mokka the *fine-janes* in their holders of gilded filigree. Here and there, the sun, as it goes down over the mountains of Cyprus, just beyond the extreme edge of the waves, lights up the picturesque embroideries which sparkle even on the poorest of rags; it draws attention to the immense shadow of the castle which protects the harbour to the right of the jetty; it is a mass of towers grouped upon the rocks, and its walls were breached and holed by the English bombardment of 1840. Now it is nothing more than a ruin held together only by its mass—a witness to the iniquity of futile destructiveness. On the left, a pier goes out into the sea with the white buildings of the customs upon it. Like the harbour itself, it is almost entirely built out of the remains of columns from the ancient Beryta or the Roman city of Julia Felix.

Will Beyrouth ever again behold the splendours which thrice have made her queen of the Lebanon? To-day her situation at the foot of verdant mountains, in the middle of fertile plains and gardens, at the end of a delightful gulf which is continually crowded with the ships of Europe; the Damascus trade, and the fact that she is a central meeting-place for the industrious

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peoples of the mountain, give Beyrouth her power and her prospects for the future. I know no place more full of life, more alive, than this port, nor any which better realises the old idea which Europe used to have of the "ports of the Levant" with their romance and their comedy. We have only to set eyes on these tall buildings, these grated windows, where often we may see the light come into the curious eyes of some young girl, to dream of mystery and adventure. Who would dare to penetrate those strongholds of marital and paternal power; or, rather, who would not be tempted so to dare? But, alas, adventure here is as rare a thing as it is at Cairo; the people here are serious and have too much to do; the bearing of the women is indicative of both comfort and hard work. There is something biblical and austere about the general impression one gains from this picture: this sea embedded between lofty promontories; the great lines of landscape which go back to different levels of mountains; the crenellated towers, the Gothic buildings incline the mind to meditation, and to reverie.

That I might see this beautiful vision in a still more beautiful light, I left the café and walked towards the promenade of Raz-Beyrouth which is on the left of the town. The ruddy glare of the setting sun was tingeing with delightful reflections the mountain chain which goes down to Sidon; on the right, the seashore seemed a mass of rocky openings, with natural pools here and there, left full of water by the storms. Women and girls were dipping their feet in them as they bathed little children there. Many of those pools seemed like the remains of ancient baths, with marble pavements. On the left, near a little mosque which stands above a Turkish burial-ground, some huge

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columns of red granite were lying on the earth, and it may be, as people say, that they mark the site of the circus of Herod Agrippa.

## VI

### THE SANTON'S TOMB

I was endeavouring to answer this question for myself when I heard songs and sounds of music coming from a ravine that is beside the city walls. I thought it might be a marriage, for the songs were joyful in character; but soon there appeared a group of Mussulmans waving banners, then others who carried on their shoulders a kind of litter containing a body. Women followed, uttering cries, and then a number of men with more banners and branches of trees.

They all came to a halt in the graveyard, and laid down the body, completely covered with flowers. The nearness of the sea gave a kind of dignity to the scene and even to the impression created by the strange songs they sang in their droning voices. Those who were taking the air gathered and watched the ceremony respectfully. An Italian business-man near me told me that this was no ordinary funeral; that the deceased was a santon who had long lived at Beyrouth where the Franks regarded him as a madman, but the Mussulmans as a saint. Recently he had lived in a grotto under a terrace in one of the gardens of the town, quite naked, and with the manners of a wild beast, and people had come from all parts to seek his counsel.

From time to time he made a tour of the town and



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took everything he thought would be useful to him from the shops of the Arab merchants. When he did this, the merchants were full of gratitude, believing that he would bring them luck; but the Europeans, not sharing this opinion, had complained to the Pasha after a few visits, and had succeeded in getting a ruling that the santon should not leave his garden. The Turks, who are not very numerous at Beyrouth, had not objected to this, and contented themselves with supplying the santon with provisions and presents. Now this personage was dead and the people showed every sign of joy, for a Turkish saint is not to be mourned in the manner of an ordinary mortal. The certainty that after so many acts of penance he has finally attained to everlasting happiness causes this event to be regarded as a happy one, and it is celebrated to the sound of music. In other days there used to be dancing, singing and public banquets in such a case.

The door of a little square-domed building, which was to be the santon's tomb, had been opened, and the dervishes, who were in the middle of the crowd, had taken the body upon their shoulders again. But just as they were about to enter, they seemed to be pushed back by some unknown power, and almost fell over backwards. There was a cry of stupefaction from the assembly. The dervishes turned angrily to the crowd, and asserted that the weeping women who followed the body, and those who sang hymns, had interrupted their songs and cries for a moment. So they began again with more accord, but again, the moment the door was about to be crossed, the same obstacle was encountered. Then some old men raised their voices. It was, they said, a whim of the worthy santon, who did not wish to go feet first into his tomb. The body was

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turned round, the chanting began again, but still another caprice, and another fall for the dervishes who were bearing the coffin.

There was a consultation. "Perhaps," said some of the faithful, "the saint does not find this tomb worthy of him, and we must build a finer."

"No, no!" said some Turks, "there is no need to fall in with all his ideas, the holy man was always rather cantankerous. Let us try to get him in. When he is once inside, he will perhaps be satisfied, and if he isn't, there will still be time to put him somewhere else."

"What are we to do?" said the dervishes.

"Well, turn him round quickly and make him dizzy, and then without giving him time to know where he is, push him through the door."

This piece of advice met with the approval of all; the songs began with a new ardour, and the dervishes, taking the coffin by both ends, turned it round and round for some minutes, and then, with a sudden movement, dashed through the door, this time with complete success. The people anxiously awaited the result of this bold attempt: for a moment they feared lest the dervishes should suffer for their boldness, and the walls fall in upon them; but before long, out they came in triumph, declaring that after a little difficulty the saint had stayed quiet. On this the crowd uttered shouts of joy and broke up, some in the direction of the country, and others to the two cafés at Raz-Beyrouth.

This was the second Turkish miracle I had been allowed to see (you will remember that of the Dhossa, in which the sheriff of Mecca rides on horseback over a road paved with the bodies of the faithful); but here the sight of this capricious dead man, who jumped about in the arms of those who carried him, and refused

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to enter his grave, reminded me of a passage in Lucian which attributes the same phantasies to a bronze statue of the Syrian Apollo. This was in a temple situated to the east of Lebanon, whose priests, once a year, used to go and wash their idols in a sacred lake. For a long time Apollo would have nothing to do with this ceremony. He did not like water, doubtless in his capacity as prince of the heavenly fires, and visibly jumped about on the shoulders of his bearers, whom he several times threw down.

According to Lucian, this performance depended upon a certain gymnastic skill on the part of the priests; but ought we to believe this assertion of the Voltaire of antiquity? For my own part I have always been more inclined to believe everything rather than to deny everything, and since the Bible admits the prodigies attributed to the Syrian Apollo, who is no other than Baal, I do not see why the power accorded to rebel genii and the spirits of Python should not have produced such results; nor do I see why the immortal soul of this poor santon should not exercise a magnetic action upon believers convinced of his sanctity.

Besides, who would be so bold as to be a sceptic at the foot of Lebanon? Is not this the very cradle of all the religions of the world? Inquire of the first mountaineer who comes by, and he will tell you that it was in this spot that the earliest scenes of the Bible were enacted; he will take you to the place where the smoke of the first sacrifice went up; he will show you the bloodstained rock of Abel. Besides, here the city of Enochia used to stand; it was built by giants and traces of it are still to be seen: it is the tomb of Canaan, the son of Cham. Then consider the matter from the point of view of Greek antiquity. From these mountains descends the smiling procession of the gods

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whom Greece accepted, transforming the style of their worship, which was propagated by Phœnician emigrants. These woods and these mountains have heard the cry of Venus weeping for Adonis, and it was in these mysterious caves, where some idolatrous sects even to this day celebrate their nocturnal orgies, that men went to pray and weep over the image of the victim, a pale idol of marble or ivory with bleeding wounds, around which weeping women imitated the plaintive cries of the goddess. The Syrian Christians have similar solemnities on Good Friday night: a mother in tears takes the place of the lover, but the plastic representation is none the less striking; the forms have been kept of that feast so poetically described in the *Idyll* of Theocritus.

Remember, too, that many primitive traditions have, in new forms of worship, only been transformed or renewed. I do not know that our Church sets any great store in the legend of Simeon Stylites, and I imagine that, without irreverence, one may consider this saint's system of mortification somewhat exaggerated; but Lucian tells us how certain holy men of antiquity stood for several days upon high stone columns which Bacchus had set up, not far from Beyrout, in honour of Priapus and Juno.

But let us get rid of this impedimenta of ancient memories and religious meditations, to which the appearance of places and the mixture of races inevitably lead. The population itself contains elements of every belief and superstition on the face of the earth. Moses, Orpheus, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammed, even the Buddha of India, all have disciples here in numbers great or small. It might be thought that this fact would give life to the city, make it a centre of ceremonies and festivals, a kind of Alexandria in the Roman

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period. But no, under the influence of modern ideas, everything is calm and dull. Doubtless on the Mountain we shall find those picturesque manners, those strange contrasts, which so many authors have mentioned, but so few have taken the trouble to go and see.

END OF VOLUME I















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